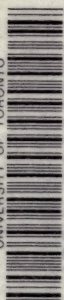


HATCHWAYS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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E. SIDGWICK

HATCHWAYS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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HATCHWAYS

BY
ETHEL SIDGWICK



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TO
THE GOOD MEMORY
OF THE FIRST ENTENTE,
WHICH MAY NO ALLIED SORROWS EVER UNSWEETEN,
THIS MY LITTLE WAR-WORK
IS EARNESTLY DEDICATED

Paris, 1916



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PART I

I

BY BACHELORS

‘ So, in short, you remain on the ground for the present, and you choose our ground to remain on, Gabriel. That is pleasant of you, anyhow.’

‘ I have not seen your ground,’ said Gabriel du Frettay, ‘ unless from several thousand metres above it. So I alight, Sir George, and I take a level observation.’ He settled into his basket-chair, and proceeded to do so.

‘ Level,’ said his host, ‘ I feel sure it will be. You want to look about you, eh? And what section of English society do you want to see?’

‘ Every section,’ said M. du Frettay. ‘ But I like the upper layers best.’

‘ You do?’ He rested slightly on the pronoun.

‘ Evidently. When I was young, I preferred the top layer of the chocolate-boxes always. But that did not prevent me, with an open mind, from tasting the rest.’

‘ You like chocolate?’ said his host, stopping in his promenade to look at his young visitor with keen kindly eyes.

‘ Madly,’ said du Frettay gravely.

‘ Excuse me—so did your father. Dear me, the time it seems. . . . Very good,’ he pursued, after an interval. ‘ Then, having not very long to spend in our box of an island, you wish to see——’

M. du Frettay's eyes glowed. 'I wish to see a Duke, if you please, and a Bishop, and a Baconian, and a boxing professional. I should like to meet an undergraduate, and what you call a—an Orange-man, and one of those who uphold the defunct Majesty Charles the First. Him I shall embrace very probably—the boxing gentleman I shall avoid it. I must meet women of all sorts: yet that, I understand, in your box I am bound. Women are in evidence, with you. The Bishop's large family of daughters, all on platforms, eclipse the Bishop. The Duchess eclipses the Duke. The bonnet eclipses the Salvation lady, yet she also is to be seen.'

'Distinctly,' said Sir George. 'But beware of her, she is used to scoffing. . . . Well, Gabriel, you have certainly come prepared. But are you aware you have come to the wrong person?'

'Not the least,' said Gabriel, who was enjoying by far the most sympathetic hospitality his letters of introduction had yet unearthed for him in London. He looked round him at the queer little quarters, obviously a flitting home—a foothold as the French say—with curiosity from which courtesy excluded amusement. He knew his father's old friend had simple tastes: still, he had expected at least a few lion-skins, and a poisoned dagger or two—some local colour from the uncharted corners of the earth in which Sir George Trenchard had spent most of his life. There was nothing whatever, unless the proofs on the table, to advertise the abode of a celebrated man.

Sir George replied to the expressive glance at once. 'I am only in England for short seasons myself,' he said, 'and the whole time I spend in preparing to plunge again. I see the people that need me'—(he

had been summoned to Court, Gabriel knew, quite recently)—‘to the exclusion often of my best friends. I pick up such things as I need, tools and weapons and medicines, and a book or two, and well-seasoned young men who have not too great a value for their existence, or whose families want to get rid of them——’

‘Show me some of those,’ said Gabriel.

‘Do I see one?’ said Sir George.

‘Ah!—no, I thank you. My family puts an unheard-of value on my existence. My mother shuddered at my venturing so far as London. What she would say if I went to Nyassa,—or Nyanza, is it?—I dare not ask.’

‘Don’t you like travelling?’ the other enquired.

‘I am travelling. Miles from home. Must I repeat it?’

Sir George, who had not spoken idly,—he seldom did,—for he liked the look of the young man, and would have been glad to attach one of his name to his little band of experts and adventurers, retreated again quietly.

‘You speak English very well,’ he said, with another pleasant look, after an interval.

‘It is my desire,’ said Gabriel, his brow bending, ‘I should say my wish, to do so.’

‘Why not your desire?’

‘Desire is a French word. The French words in your vocabulary are only used by shopmen, footmen, and the Gallicised individual.’

‘Which you are not? Ah,—dear me,—well, you may be right.’ He considered for a time. ‘Do you like the country?’

‘Enormously, in England,’ said du Fretay. ‘At home, I enjoy the town.’

'I see, you adapt yourself. The fact is, there is no town for the moment, in the sense you want. Parliament is not sitting. The Dukes and Bishops would be at home.'

'Do you know a Duke?' said du Frettay, fixing him for the first time with his very bright blue eyes. They were no sort of English blue, and set in the French manner; but they were the eyes of his family, and Sir George remembered them at once.

'I know a Duchess,' he said.

'*Ah, bon!* Typical, is she?'

'Well,—she is a useful woman.'

'Interesting?'

'I can't answer for that. She is an old friend.'

'Pardon.' Du Frettay hung fire, watching the serious brown face opposed to him. More and more he liked the man. He would almost have faced Nyanza to know him better,—almost, not quite.

'The boys might suit you,' said Sir George, who was still pondering, seeking ways and means to launch his guest amid his multiple businesses. 'They are not typical of anything, specially; still, they're nice young fellows. How old are you, Gabriel?' He turned.

'Thirty, Sir George.'

'No, are you really? Dear, dear, how time goes on. I remember though——' He brought up again in his musing,—he was a very absent lion, this. 'But we were talking of the Duchess's boys. Wickford is—let me see—twenty-eight. That would suit fairly. The other's younger. They would all be at Holmer now.' He waited, cogitating anew, his eyes wandering to his proofs.

'Don't bother about me, Sir George,' young du Frettay put into the pause, in his neat nimble utter-

ance. He had knowledge enough to use the title, and he spoke it perfectly,—only he scanned it wrong. ‘Sir-George’ observed it, absent as he was. Our language, bad enough to master in its separate details, has a last knock-down blow to offer the foreigner in the emphasis of locutions, which are worse than words. M. du Fretay, who could probably have scanned without a blink such nice little mouthfuls as irrefutable and conciliatory, was baffled by the two syllables of Sir George’s name.

‘I was not serious,’ he explained. ‘Being happy, I seldom am.’

‘I think,’ said Sir George, coming to a decision and a stand, simultaneously, ‘you had better know Ernestine.’

‘Is that the Duchess?’

‘No, but next door to her. A better way than mine. The question is—Hullo, here’s Marchant. Now, this is luck. Marchant, here’s a young man who——’

Seizing the new-comer by the arm, he was running ahead reckless of forms, when he was reminded of the habits of civilization by Gabriel’s getting up. Perhaps in the wilds of Uganda Sir George occasionally forgot about the social forms, or took them for granted; but Gabriel and Mr. Marchant would not allow him. The new arrival, indeed, looked extraordinarily correct, and a little frightened. The fact of a Frenchman accounted, possibly, for the shade of fear.

‘Marchant,’ said Sir George, ‘is a Professor, Gabriel. A Professor of Forestry.’

‘Forestry,’ said Gabriel, looking intelligent. ‘Enchanted.’

‘A professor,’ said Sir George, ‘is the top layer of our society, whatever it may be of yours.’

Mr. Marchant appeared a trifle more harassed, at this. He was not an old man, but he had a world-weary aspect, which hampered Gabriel at first. Finding on further acquaintance that it did not the least express his nature, he laid it finally to a prolonged struggle with the climate of a University town.

'He will be extremely useful to you,—oh, yes, you will, Marchant,—far more than I. He knows, for instance, an undergraduate.'

'More than one,' said Marchant.

'Several. He knows a Bishop, certainly. I bet he could find you a Baconian, to look at,—and an Orangeman, for that matter. We both could. Hey?'

'Oh, Lord, yes, I suppose so,' said Marchant, having reflected. 'But what's all this?'

'He is acquainted with a Duchess,' pursued Sir George. 'Unluckily the same as mine.'

'The same as most people's,' said Marchant. 'The dear woman is really so active——'

'Has she been interfering with the Forestry plantations? I forgot you were on her ground.'

'It's not her ground,' said Mr. Marchant. 'I did a private deal with the Duke over that bit of land. The Duke's of age. If her Grace comes poaching——'

'A private deal? With Wickford? My good man, she'll never let you hear the last of it.'

'Why not?' said Marchant, growing excitable. 'They want money, or so the Redgates inform me. I want land, decent land, with stuff upon it fit to grow. If Wickford can't stand up to her at his age it's not my——'

'Gently, gently,' said Sir George. 'Du Frettay is out of all this. Now I will explain to you about du Frettay, who loves Forestry plantations. They are intensely English things——'

‘German,’ said Mr. Marchant.

‘Oh, good heavens! Well, we will pass it over. Du Frettay is a young man who flies.’

‘What?’

‘Yes. He flies too much. He overdid it, and his mother grew anxious. Since then, he has improved flying for other people, and being an excitable and intensive sort of young man, he overdid it again. He has now come to England, really on secret service in the flying interest, ostensibly for a holiday, of an instructive kind. He wants to take notes of our place, and poke about a little,—much as I do in East Africa. He may or may not, in my own manner, publish the results. He reserves the right of choosing.’ (Sir George glanced at the proofs, with resentment.) ‘He prefers the best society——’

‘Unlike you,’ said Marchant.

‘Most unlike. He is afraid of nobody,—unlike me again.’

‘Can he face dinner-parties?’ said Marchant. ‘Mixed ones, George?’ There seemed to be some private bearing, in these remarks.

‘Good heavens, yes,—chooses them probably. Nothing daunts him: hostesses in diamonds, red tape, black gaiters, blue ribbons——’

‘He had better know Ernestine,’ said Mr. Marchant.

There was a pause. Trenchard’s and du Frettay’s eyes met. Then, with a sudden impulse, necessary in this absent lion’s haunts, both the guests agreed to sit down. They found two chairs which faced one another. Sir George still stood about the hearthrug,—in different corners of it, still, more or less in place.

‘Who is Ernestine?’ asked M. du Frettay.

‘Ernestine,’ said Mr. Marchant, ‘is everybody. Have you seen that old play somebody scraped up recently and made the fashion, they call Everyman? Well, Ernestine is Everywoman. She hardly exists, as a separate individual.’

‘Oh, come, come,’ said the gentler Sir George. ‘Ernestine exists all right. You ask the boys.’

‘But this is excellent,’ said Gabriel. ‘All my life it has been my desire—wish—to know all women. I have not accomplished it. Even all Frenchwomen, the majority, alas, escape me. Now I shall attain it, in this lady’s acquaintance?’

‘She’ll see to you,’ was the Professor’s reply. He seemed curious, a little, about du Frettay, but nothing offensive. Flying,—then a new study,—was enough to spur curiosity.

‘The question is,’ said Sir George, ‘how to get hold of her: how to get hold of anybody. Here I am, fixed.’ He struck his foot down.

‘You’re not, George,’ said Mr. Marchant. ‘That’s nonsense. A week-end at Holmer would do you all the good in the world. Only you’re sure the Duchess would give a party for you if you went. If that’s the fact, why not admit it?’ He had a kind of angelic reproachfulness.

‘Of course she would,’ said Sir George, looking conscious. ‘Not but what I am fond of Gertrude, in a general way. Even in having a party for me, I should be certain she meant well. Only——’

There was another easy interval. The friendship of the two had a well-tested ease that spread unaware to the third party. Indeed, it embraced him. Marchant was now considering ways and means in his interest, just like Sir George. It greatly amused Gabriel, at his

stage of life and experience, to be so taken in hand ; but, passive of intention, he listened and ' *laissait faire*.' That something would come of it, granted these men, he could not doubt, their goodwill was so genuine.

' I thought the boys might suit du Frettay,' said Sir George, now slightly deprecating. ' They always seemed to me decent young fellows,—and not devoid of brains.'

' The younger's brains of a sort,' said Marchant, with a passing professional grimness.

' Then there's Adelaide,' pursued the lion, more hopefully. ' She's a fairly typical English girl.'

' There's Lise,' said Marchant. ' Exquisite, if exceptional. . . . Look here——' He met M. du Frettay's bright eyes, which had been shifting rapidly at all these names. ' Suppose you drop George,—leave him to his interviews and rubbish,—and come down with me for the week-end to Holmer Hatch.'

' Week-end,' said M. du Frettay. ' I shall be delighted.' Indeed, such an inimitably English thing, who could refuse ? ' But you must not,' he carefully added, ' put yourself out for me.'

' I shan't,' said the Professor simply. ' I'm going down in any case before term opens, to look at my plantations. I've got a sort of a box, down there, does for me and a pupil, at need. I can put you up all right,—granted you can manage with bachelor quarters——'

M. du Frettay smiled. Happening to possess a finished appearance, no one this side seemed to reckon for the fact that he had ever roughed it in camp.

' I'll introduce you to the Redgates,' said Marchant. ' That's Ernestine,—Mrs. Redgate is Ernestine's real

name. That's all the start you'll want for the Duchess, specially with George at your back. Mention George, and Holmer magnificence will crack at once. I shall have no trouble in getting rid of you, M. du Frettay. I shall shunt you on to Holmer within the week.'

'Holmer is the Duchess?' asked Gabriel.

'Holmer is the Duchess,—Hatchways is Ernestine. Personally,' said Marchant, 'I should recommend Ernestine's place in preference to the Duchess's——'

'So should I,' said a dreamy voice in the background. 'Oh, so should I.'

'You see, he agrees with me. Ernestine lets you alone, somehow, doesn't she, George? She looks after you all right, but effaces herself sufficiently,—without prejudice to being there when she's wanted, such as when the bath goes wrong. She hasn't any little dogs and things that bark. She doesn't expect you to talk in the morning——'

'Perhaps,' said Gabriel, 'she talks herself.'

'No,—no, she does not. Talk?—Ernestine? Of course, she says things, when you meet her about the place. In the afternoon, she stops where she is, you know where to find her. No racketing about to lectures and stuff——' The Professor, urged no doubt by University memories, was getting harassed again. On first falling upon the subject of Ernestine, his expression had grown beautifully calm.

'Even to an Oxford bachelor,' joined in Sir George, 'fixed in the habits of luxury, and fussy beyond belief, Ernestine, as you see, can do no harm. She is particularly harmless. We love her——'

'What?' said Mr. Marchant.

'Simply love her,—all we selfish bachelors do. We never say so, our hearts only melt within us when, in

the middle of all sorts of other things, we are asked by her to come and stay. We drop the other things, which for weeks have been our best excuses. We go to Ernestine, and she meets us,—that is, she always meets me——’

‘Age,’ said Marchant, very unpleasantly. ‘She makes no favourites.’

‘Does she not?’ du Fretay asked,

‘No. Hey?’ For the lion had once more ceased parade, his back towards them.

‘Oh, I think she has a favourite,’ he said. ‘I think so. I own it’s uncommonly hard to tell. . . .’

‘Well,’ said Marchant, after a pause of regarding him. ‘Anyhow, there you are. Couldn’t do better than Hatchways,—could he, George?’

‘No,’ said the lion. ‘Certainly not. . . . And if, while you are about there, Stephen, you happen to see a chance of suggesting I could come for a day or two,—some time when Gertrude is being detained in London——’

‘I shall do no such thing!’ cried Marchant. ‘Where are the obligations of old friendship you are always talking about? What’s Hatchways to you? If you won’t stop with me at the Lodge, Holmer’s your business: the Avenue, and the Shrubberies, and the portraits, and that dreary dinner-table in that beastly dark room, and English pretension all mixed up with Irish untidiness——’

‘Hush, hush,’ said Sir George, anxiously. ‘Stop, Stephen, I won’t have this. I can’t, you know. Holmer does make me shudder, if you like, but it’s not Gertrude’s fault. Nothing in the world could make a house like that attractive. It’s not her fault either if the Redgates have an attractive little house half a mile

away. Hatchways is easily the prettiest bit of land I know, quite apart from what Redgate has done for it. One's heart leaps up, if one is English, merely stepping inside their gate. Coming from East Africa particularly. Coming from France——'

'It shall leap,' said Gabriel, wickedly.

'It will. It will,—listen! There are larch-trees, with branches like knotted string all bunched with little cones. There are squirrels to eat them. There are no glass-houses or view-points or vulgarity——'

'There is a view-point,' interrupted Marchant. 'I found it last time I was there.'

'Well, so did I, and it wouldn't be the same one. Everyone for themselves, at Hatchways,—nothing prescribed,—it's England, that. Gabriel thinks he knows better,—but then he never stayed there. Perhaps, with all his arts, he never will. . . . Do you know the long growth of primroses in a hazel-wood, all dredged with last year's leaves? How you reach down inches of coolness to find the buds? Do you know the chuckle of the nightingale those first incredibly hot May days——'

'Days?' said du Frettay.

'There you are! You only allow him to perform at midnight, probably. Do you know how he ventriloquises,—the times Iveagh and I have stalked him,—you'll like Iveagh, by the way,—never any luck! The bird's uncanny, the poets are right,—calling him a wandering voice——'

'They didn't, that was the cuckoo,' said Gabriel.

Sir George, dropping rhetoric, turned and faced him, reproachfully grave. 'Was it?' he said. 'Well, anyhow, that's Ernestine. That was what we were making for, wasn't it? Ease and sun and afternoon pleasant—'

ness,—and any point of view you like to take.' He laughed at himself. 'Odd it works out like that, but it is so.' He glanced at his friend, who nodded.

'And shyness, like the primrose buds?' asked Gabriel. 'And mystery, like the nightingale?'

'No, no, I think not.' The lion pondered. 'She is very simple.'

'All women are mysterious,' the Frenchman suggested.

'Ernestine isn't,' cut in Marchant, seemingly vexed. 'No moonshine about her,—don't you go off with those ideas. Ernestine's English,—she's as straight as they make them. She—she—well, there isn't much to say about her. She's just a nice woman, explains herself, you wait and see her. Not,' finished Marchant with the same effort, 'that there's much to see.'

'She is not beautiful then?'

'Good heavens, no! Don't go expecting,' said Marchant anxiously, 'anything out of the way. That's George's fault, maundering about the garden. It's a pretty garden, of course, but there are thousands in England as good——'

'An Every-garden,' murmured Sir George in a far corner.

'But Madame—Ernestine is not to be talked of, then?' persisted du Frettay. 'She is not spoken of, though being so desired?' As both the elder men gazed at one another, as it were disturbed,—'You mean it is better to know her,' he summed up to relieve them.

'That's it, the only thing is to know her. Then you're all right. And that,' said Mr. Marchant, as though recovering from an annoying diversion, 'is where we started from. . . . Now look here, du Frettay. As to trains . . .'

II

SURFACES

TRAINS were to the point. Gabriel met Ernestine Redgate first in the train, or rather on the platform ; the same being an interesting addition to his notes on London life. The week-end habit, being a Parisian, was new to him : as also was that of living out of town. Parisians live in a town,—the more in it the better,—the closer, the dearer, the prouder to cling to Paris' heart. The English avoid their London, so pompously advertised, as much as possible. Needing London inevitably, they take trains to and fro. That is to say, they take the train,—ordinarily, to good places like Holmer, there is but one, each way, that is right and classical.

This was the train, needless to say, that Mr. Marchant took. And so did Mrs. Redgate take it, who had come up to shop seriously at the January Sales. And so, it appeared, as names cropped up in the discourse, one by one, did several other members of their future society. Everybody met everybody upon the platform, which, though not quite so unsavoury as a French terminus platform, was still a somewhat quaint background for a social gathering. Thus, M. du Fretay began early to be amused.

One of the Duchess's sons was in the train, he learnt, as was also Miss Adelaide Courtier, heretofore mentioned as the typical English girl. So, it eventually

appeared, and quite independently of his daughter, was Miss Courtier's father, a Justice of the Peace and everything he should be, including a bully of the country-side. So, utterly independent of either of these, was Miss Courtier's mother, who lived (for some unexplained reason) in London, and merely came to the Holmer train to call, so to speak, upon her conveniently-collected friends. They were all (except this last mysterious lady) going home again, after a happy day's gadding for various purposes. That is, the main body had been gadding happily. Mrs. Redgate had been assiduously engaged as Providence for others, the Duchess to wit.

Gabriel guessed who she was from the simple fact of his companion looking pleased at the sight of her. He had observed him look frightened first, of everybody else. Not but what Marchant could talk well, and wittily even, when escape was really cut off. Only the Heaven of which he dreamed,—and practically reached, at Oxford,—was to meet nobody at all.

'How do you do?' said Ernestine, turning. 'Are you coming into residence? Oh, that's nice.' She then smiled on introduction to Gabriel,—no more. She was distracted in mind, waiting for various parcels and persons, essential to her day's providences, and non-appearing. She had a pleasant ordinary voice, and pretty smile, and she was tall, to French ideas,—that was all Gabriel noticed. Her next remark was to ask the time of Professor Marchant.

'Oh, dear,—Bess,' she said to herself. 'Bad girl, she promised. She will be late.'

Gabriel wondered who Bess was: he felt a pang of conjectural interest. However, too many stars were rising and setting in this active little station reception

for him to spare much time for merely conjectural divinities. Holmer society seemed to contain, at least, a remarkable number of pretty girls. They cropped up, one by one, unescorted, swinging parcels and smiling at Ernestine. Some of them spared a glance as well for M. du Frettay, who, needless to say, looked back. First impressions, he trusted, were pleasant all round. For himself, he was quite contented, seated in his carriage-corner, arms folded, observing the world.

‘ I am taking down ten sacks——’ said Ernestine.

‘ Sacks ? ’ said Marchant.

‘ Yes. For the Duchess. Sacks of sand.’

‘ Sand ? ’ repeated Marchant. ‘ What on earth does she want sand for ? ’

‘ Nothing in your line,’ said Ernestine. ‘ It’s for the school,—the infants to play in. It’s very kind of Gertrude to—— Oh, Adelaide, dear. Have you seen Bess ? ’

With the words, a very bright particular star arose for du Frettay, in the person of Miss Courtier, who, escorted by the Duchess’s son, at this moment made her appearance. The former, a plain young man, merely nodded and went on down the train. Miss Courtier smiled affably, her eyes at once taking in the stranger, and moved, with a limp, in their direction.

The Professor was frightened, of course: but Ernestine was there, at the door of his carriage, to protect him. The limp, calling for enquiry and condolence, had first to be explained. They heard all about it, from Adelaide, in loud and lively tones. She had slipped on the ice, turned her ankle, a ‘ beastly bore.’ A party of them, including ‘ Sam and Iveagh,’ had come up to skate, since nature refused them that gratification in the country. They had not been at it half an hour

when—sickening!—spoilt their day. She took it, and her probable pain, du Frettay thought, with exquisite good humour. She was really a lovely girl. She was clothed well, though gaily to his Parisian taste, in crimson and white, and must have looked most effective, skating with the plain young man. For that he had been her partner, du Frettay, at the present stage, dared not doubt.

‘Oh, that silly sand,’ said Adelaide, accepting the subject. ‘Yes, that’s the latest,—hadn’t you heard? Renie Allgood doesn’t want sand for the infants, it’s only Lady Wick told her she did. She ought to want it. Now, of course, sand’s a necessity of life, for everybody. Anyhow, none of our lives will be fit for much, till it’s properly dumped. And of course Ernestine has got to dump it. No one else has time.’ She turned rallying eyes on the Professor’s guardian.

‘I hope, Mrs. Redgate,’ said Marchant, ‘Her Grace does not intend to turn Holmer into a seaside place. If she adds an esplanade, I should like to be warned in time. As it is, there are too many children about.’

‘Then,’ said Ernestine, ‘you shan’t come to my children’s party.’

‘May I?’ ventured Gabriel, catching her eye.

‘Oh yes, do,’ said Adelaide, calmly. ‘Men are always useful, aren’t they, Ernestine?’

Mrs. Redgate smiled merely. She was certainly not a loquacious lady. The next instant, in obedience to a complicated private sign from a porter, she disappeared.

Miss Courtier, to the Professor’s confusion, did not follow her. He had not reckoned, evidently, on his smart young aviator letting him in for things like this. Adelaide, up to now, had always been kind enough to

overlook him. Yet here she was still, lively as ever, and inclined to besiege them with confidence.

‘Iveagh ought to be doing it,’ she observed of the sand. ‘But he told Ernestine he wouldn’t. Iveagh’s got enough to do looking after me.’

‘Did he say that?’ asked Marchant.

‘Oh no,—but you know Iveagh. His back’s up, having to come at all. He’s just on the edge of breaking out. Sand into the bargain would have done for him,—specially the Duchess’s,—Ernestine knows. It’s a rotten shame,’ said Adelaide casually, ‘she should be fagged for it. She’s doing the infant’s treat, as it is, which anyone would have thought would be enough. I tell her, the only thing’s to stick out and refuse,—but she never does. So she gets put upon.’ Thus moralising, Miss Courtier’s independent glance met M. du Frettay’s.

‘If I could be of any use to Madame—’ he suggested, stirring.

‘Oh, you couldn’t, I don’t suppose.’

‘Is it necessary the sand should be personally conducted?’ Gabriel asked, re-settling at command.

‘Of course,’ smiled Adelaide. ‘Goodness, do you think it could get down to Holmer alone? It’s a very special sort, from a Froebel Institute, not just from anywhere underground——’

‘Sterilised?’ asked Gabriel.

‘Sanitary?’ murmured Marchant.

—‘And the Duchess got it in person from a place in the City, so you mustn’t laugh. And she’s not able to see to it herself, naturally,—since Wickford can’t ever be trusted to make a speech alone——’

‘So Mrs. Redgate must?’

‘Oh, there’s no necessity! Lady Wick wouldn’t like

her to give up better things for it. If Ernestine was engaged in more useful work——' She winked in the Professor's direction.

'You would have had to do it,' he suggested.

'I? The Duchess doesn't fag me . . . Iveagh might have had to, or a footman might have come up. . . . I'm telling them all about you and Lady Wick and the sandbags, Ernestine.'

The Professor's harassed look melted again,—she was back.

'I think they'll be all right now,' said Mrs. Redgate, dusting her bare fingers. 'And I've wired the cart to come down. After that,—really!'

'Hadn't you better walk up with them?' scoffed Adelaide. 'Hullo!'

She broke off and turned about, as the late passenger a tall, handsome, fur-coated gentleman, with an amazingly strong colour on him, shouldered his way past, affording her a glance of recognition,—it really could not be called more,—as he went.

'Why, *there's* my respected father,' said Adelaide, much surprised. 'What's *he* playin' at? Oho!' She interrupted herself, turning to the company. '*That'll* be the limit, for Iveagh! Father here,—he needn't have come at all! What a game, I say. What do you bet he goes back?'

'Anything you like,' said Mrs. Redgate.

'He'll be savage, though,' said Adelaide, complacently. 'I rather like riling Iveagh,—there's always a kind of hope he may go over the edge. 'Sides, Wick advised me not to.' She made the little click that one does on a coachman's box, just audible, charming on her tongue. 'Well, so long,' she added, swinging her gloves. 'I'm going up.'

‘ I hope you’ll get a place, dear,’ said Ernestine.

‘ Oh, he’ll keep one. Two, I said, to put my foot up. I told him,’ was Miss Courtier’s parting remark, with an exquisite smile, ‘ a smoker would do.’

The Professor’s and Mrs. Redgate’s eyes met, at her departure, but, perhaps because a stranger was present, they made no comment. Du Frettay was able to amuse himself with all kinds of conjectures as to the position of that beautiful girl, in the undoubtedly elegant household it might shortly be his luck to enter,—entirely free from hampering facts. That Mrs. Redgate held all the facts, in the quiet depths of her, he was curiously convinced : since she was a lady who looked at people in that way, and said so little.

The next moment, even this train of thoughts was arrested in him, for ‘ Bess ’ appeared. Bess, long-desired, with a large basket,—an English country market-basket, spread with a cloth,—broke through the bustle behind Mrs. Redgate, and Gabriel’s conjectural interest bloomed into fact. Yet another charming girl,—what a country !

‘ Bess,—thank goodness ! ’ was Ernestine’s comment, as the basket changed hands. ‘ It’s heavy,—goodness ! Dear, I hope you haven’t had to rush.’ She did not seem anxious, though : and certainly Bess’s looks left no room for anxiety.

‘ Now I’ve got to fly,’ said Bess, immediately. ‘ That makes the last, doesn’t it, Ernestine ?—the rest they swore to send. What about the sacks ?—oh, that’s all right. I saw Iveagh, he’ll do it at the other—won’t he ? Horrid boy, he might ! Good-bye, it’s been too short,—it always is——’ And she kissed Ernestine.

‘ Till March fifteen,’ said Mrs. Redgate, holding her :

a date registered, of course, by an attentive young man. 'Oh, Bess,—fancy! He hadn't got any little trees! None left,—and I do hate a borrowed one, dropping needles about. Don't you?'

'Professor Marchant will give you one,' said Bess. 'He's a nursery.' And she went, buoyantly as she had arrived, just two minutes previously.

'What's that?' fussed Marchant, awaking. 'What did she say? A nursery?'

'A little tree,' explained Ernestine, with her nice smile. 'Late Christmas, you know. Bess was naughty,' she added, to explain.

M. du Frettay gazed in the wake of the naughty Bess with distinct regret. It was perfectly perceptible. Why could she not enter the train, like Adelaide? Why, like Adelaide's mother, should she return to town? She looked more adapted to the country, had she allowed him to explain. . . . However,—March fifteen.

On the Holmer platform, which, though limited in size, was a very smart one, brand-new, ash-strewn, and smelling of paint, du Frettay was properly presented to the Duke's brother, younger son of the reigning family, and exchanged a few words with him.

'You come for the huntin'?' said Iveagh, with an expression of dogged sulks upon his countenance, his eyes shifting watchfully in Adelaide's direction. He was twenty-two at most, and built, for an islander, very lightly.

'I am come,' said du Frettay, in his nimble tone, 'for anything I can get. But above all, I believe, to know Mrs. Redgate.'

'Oh.' Iveagh's sulky eyes shot to him. 'Yes,

you'd hardly avoid that,' he said evenly, 'Marchant bein' in her pocket.'

'I do not wish to avoid it,' Gabriel explained.

The Duke's brother produced what might be called a smile: it just cancelled his determined ill-temper for a moment.

'You know Trenchard, don't you?' he proceeded, clouding again.

'That is, I have met him. My father knew.'

'Did he? Where?' He struck at the 'h' in this word, Gabriel noted, more than any island-tongue he had yet come across.

'In Morocco first, and later in Marseille, and at last in Paris,' he answered.

Iveagh, again slightly abating his dreariness, turned over the list.

'This is a fool of a place,' he said, to du Frettay's surprise. 'However—take what you can get, in this life.'

'I intend to,' said Gabriel.

'You ride?' was Iveagh's next remark. He was still carefully noting Adelaide's movements in the distance.

'Anything I can find,' said Gabriel.

'It's only—Marchant's nothing, of course. Redgate's nothing to speak of. You'd better come up in the—Dash!—all right.'

He was cut off by a hail from Adelaide, who, in the interval, had met her handsome father, and, as it were, renewed acquaintance, rather unfortunately. She had better not have attempted it. Their scene was loud. Iveagh marched off with an easy step to take his destined part in it, which would not, du Frettay imagined, be a noisy one. He had an unemphatic

intonation, with a curl to it, difficult but not disagreeable to the attentive foreign ear.

'I say, your sandbag's bleedin',' he called back to Mrs. Redgate, in the act of leaving the station.

'Oh, Iveagh,—get a *needle!*' she returned, her gentle tone perturbed to passion almost, by this last undeserved calamity. It was too true. Froebel (or whoever it was) had not sewn those sandbags up, according to his usual strict method. Being too roughly hoisted from the trolley to the cart, one of them had broken a seam, and determined at once to lay down all its burdens, then and there, with a sigh in the muddy road. We make no apology for the metaphor. There is nothing, unless Death, to equal for inevitability fine heavy sand, once it begins to exude. It poured, it lapsed, it fled away. The sack's hours were numbered. The top of it was already bending languidly, the whole generous bulk seemed to dwindle and faint,—when Iveagh and the needle returned together, in the nick of time. A needle, in a brand-new country station, would have seemed even to Gabriel's ingenuity a difficult thing to find: yet this sulky young man found, offered, and disappeared finally with the mocking and impatient Adelaide.

Thereupon, the flow of the sack's life was assuaged, the two gentlemen doing first-aid, while Mrs. Redgate sewed up the wound. Little had been actually lost,—Gabriel congratulated her gravely. He was thoroughly amused by now, content to accept anything, take anything as entertainment, in this quaint new country world. Her business-like seriousness over the sacks amused him as much as Adelaide's contempt, the porter's polite perplexity, and the Professor's intense discomfort in a situation so palpably absurd.

Gabriel adored absurd situations in life, so long as he was freely allowed to find them so. He adored them whether they included himself or not. And Mrs. Redgate, for all her seriousness over 'Gertrude's' property, allowed him, accepted with complete understanding all his jests. He even caught her laughing herself, when the convalescent sack was comfortable, carefully dumped in the cart, and leaning its pathetically crooked cap against the rest.

'I suppose I can trust them to ride alone from here to Holmer,' she said to Gabriel. And again—'I don't know why they make me think of pigs.'

'Because their only virtue is to be corpulent,' confided Gabriel, 'and they are aware of it. When corpulence is threatened,—crac! there is pathos. Real pathos, the only,—look at him supported by his comrades.' They laughed again. 'Shakespeare could do that sack,' said Gabriel. 'Or possibly—Lafontaine.'

'A fable, yes.' As the Professor mounted first into the dogcart, she added—'Do you like *things*?'

'I love *things*,' said Gabriel. 'If for nothing else, to be ridiculous. That consoles me, who am less so.'

'Oh! Are you quite sure?'

'Perfectly. Do you read French, Madame?'

'Yes, and speak it badly. You will find most of us the same.'

'Then I shall teach you all,' said Gabriel, following the Professor into the dogcart. 'If I stay long enough.'

The next instant, saluting, they left her in the road.

III

THE FACTS

ERNESTINE REDGATE, aged thirty-two, was not 'gracious' the least,—she was sensible. She had a sensible husband, aged forty-five, and they took the fact that they had no child with equanimity. Her London acquaintance was remarkably large: she knew everybody, more or less, and she had the knack of being there when things of note were happening. As for her own 'things,' nobody ever knew why they went off. There was no particular reason for it, in herself or her surroundings. She had not been a particularly clever girl, she was certainly not in the common sense of the word 'ambitious,' above all socially. She was not swimmingly 'sympathetic' to all sorts and kinds. She was not seductive—to any kind, one might say. She was everything, at the period of which we write, which nobody had predicted of her. She was everything, and she was nothing, in a manner of her own: perhaps there was a grain of mystery in it,—like the nightingale.

Her descent no one had troubled to track, beyond the fact that she was northern, vaguely: possibly of the industrial north. The unpretentious energy of her was northern,—her stability, in business and friendship,—and that staid serenity of demeanour Sir George called 'afternoon.' If she and Rick Redgate had ever been

in love with one another, nobody found it out. The Duchess of Wickford said there was no billing and cooing in their establishment, and gave it as ground of her approval. Yet the Redgate couple matched, at least. Neither obliterated the other, when they appeared in concert: both were in demand. Rick,—who wrote articles, regularly, for quite good papers,—might be said to be the more popular. He had attractive oddities, and said quaint things. Rick's wife had no oddities, or none at all easy to detect. 'Nesta,' as he called her, was not a character,—a figure still less. Nesta was merely necessary: and Rick, lacking her, seemed to grow cumbrous and ill at ease.

To look at she was tallish and straight, square-shouldered in the middle English style, in figure neither gaunt nor exuberant. She was personable, pleasant, as she should be. She would have looked extremely well in officer's uniform: and it really seemed a pity, once one had the idea, and in view of the quiet official position she habitually assumed, she could not wear one. As it was, she was far too wise to attempt erratic styles in clothes. She found little things about London that suited her, and at times, with a smile to her intimate friends, exhibited a complete new dress. 'Rick likes it,' she would say, of one of these efforts, at the season's opening,—Rick having volunteered such praise, of course. Laying herself out for notice or flattery was about the last thing Ernestine could be said to do. Consequently, men and women liked her equally.

She had the somewhat unfair advantage, in the eye of the world, of an old acquaintance with the Wickford family. She knew the Duchess Gertrude, as has been hinted, well. She had known Gertrude's husband,—

that is, he had been memorably gracious to her, once or twice, as a young married woman. She knew Gertrude's own relations, the Oxboroughs, quite well enough to realise by how many degrees Gertrude was the best of them. She knew the present young representative, and his brother, Lord Iveagh Suir, when they were schoolboys at Eton. She knew Adelaide Courtier, whom for years the Duchess had been trying to induce Wickford to marry, fruitlessly. She knew Lise Elphinstone, now in India, with whom Iveagh was—to his mother's ideas—perpetually and idiotically in love. She knew in short the Wickfords' set, their intimate set, not their London swirl. She was in the Duchess's confidence, about her stupid sons.

She was moreover,—and this exhibits Ernestine—in the sons' confidence also; to what extent, their mother had no idea.

Wickford came, and sat in her drawing-room, in the morning when she did not want him, and said explosive things about marriage, which no Duke of the realm should say, and just avoided, owing to Mrs. Redgate's proximity, saying explosive things about Adelaide also. That Wickford did not regard Ernestine as extremely married,—as aggressively married,—was obvious in his remarks. Nor was it, she was given to understand, that Wickford did not *want* to be married, nor even that he did not *intend* to be, in his own good time. It was merely that his mother did not *know* about it. His mother did not know about the kid, either (Iveagh was the kid). His mother was a good woman, and all that. He wished he was out of it (probably the Peerage). He wished the kid could get to Africa, and forget that girl. He wished he could write his book (something statistical and very dull) in peace. He wished

(once or twice and in a very low tone) his father was alive. A man's father understood,—about girls and those things, anyhow.

Ernestine, who was not a 'good woman and all that,' presumably, did not at once make a party for the young Duke, her best acquaintance, invite a new and dazzlingly attractive girl to meet him, and so cut out her dear friend by marrying Wick over his mother's head, as she could easily have done. She let him talk, and attended, so far as she could follow his lines of thought. He was extraordinarily bad at expressing himself, and always had been from his school-days. Iveagh also was an amazingly bad hand in conversation,—quite inconceivably,—except on the subject of Lise.

Lise, Iveagh's lily, his saint, was married; but it made, as he did not trouble to explain to Ernestine,—though his mother harped on it,—no difference. She had captivated his Irish soul—the Suirs were Irish—in maidenhood, and he swore by her perfections to all time. Nobody sang like Lise, spoke as she did, looked so adorably, stirred so exquisitely, sat, rose, kneeled, breathed, and laughed,—just like her. She had curled herself into Iveagh, into the very core of his being, while she played to him, in the candle-light, Irish songs. Three years since, when both were under twenty,—but what then? And what now? Need a man forget her, merely because she married Elphinstone, and left the hemisphere where Iveagh corporeally dwelt? There was no sense in forgetting, since he loved remembering best. He had not shot himself,—Wickford had saved him,—but he still did not think, in spite of all his brother's 'jawing,' it would have been wrong. Iveagh was the perfect lover, because he was quite natural. He was as un-self-

conscious as Wickford, and as most well-descended Irish people. He was very plain, like Wickford, cannily and compactly made, sober and circumspect in the things of life,—like Wickford,—always excepting Lise. In that department madness, the true, inexpressible, mystical Celtic madness, permanently hung.

Ernestine admitted that a pair of ordinary-featured, unheroic sons like Wickford and Iveagh were hard on the Duchess. Indeed it was not only as a duchess it was hard on her. Gertrude was, as a woman, monumentally maternal. She was made so, never stopped for a minute. Now, it struck Ernestine, though it is possible and even necessary to some women to be continuously maternal, it is not possible to have a couple of grown-up sons in a state of flat filiality all the time. More especially Irish sons, with extremely natural manners, which rarely did them justice in women's society, occasional hot tempers, and alarmingly soft hearts. The Duchess was striving, especially in Iveagh's case, after an impossibility. Wickford, with all the conscience of an eldest-born, with Iveagh and the estates alike weighing his poor soul down, was a blessing to his mother, and everything he ought to be, now and then.

It may have been because Ernestine never dealt with them in the maternal vein, any more than in the married one, that the Suir boys, in society, were found so constantly at her side. Nor, of course, was she sisterly,—Iveagh would have hated that,—she was merely Ernestine and nice to them.

Consequently—we tremble to state it—at twenty-two and twenty-eight respectively, the Suir boys liked Mrs. Redgate far better than their own mother, which was a dreadful state of things, but occurs much oftener

in the world, at the age of evolution and sensibility, than many mothers are aware. Youth is a ticklish thing, the influences that work its changes incalculable. The touch that, at eighteen, would be wasted utterly, will at nineteen send the subject racketing through change after change with the startling effect of a kaleidoscope. In other cases complete abstention from touching is the only hope. To judge how to touch, and whether, is, of course, the parental privilege. But, when, in the next world, pastors, educators, god-fathers and friends speak up, the natural authority will certainly be amazed by their possession. Parents (if parental) cannot know, by their posture they are debarred from it. Youth goes seeking in strange fields, trespassing, trampling and pirating invariably. It will not stay at home. This is no more than its right, in the strict ordering of our nature's 'jungle law,'—and people like Ernestine grasp it.

Besides, she liked Gertrude's boys. So did Rick like Iveagh,—Wickford was apt to bore him. He called him a dreary beggar, and added that the eldest sons of distinguished people almost invariably were so. He also bothered Nesta, said Rick. He came too often, and he stayed too long. At one time, when he was most anxious about Iveagh, he was constantly hanging about. Wickford's preoccupation about Iveagh seemed to Rick always a little odd,—almost embarrassing. Why not slack off a bit, said Rick, and let the young fellow go his own way, being no fool?

'There would not be much of Iveagh left, if Wick had done that,' said Ernestine, in the non-committal tone she used domestically.

'What, that shooting business?' Rick frowned. 'You know, I always suspect 'em of exaggerating,—

the Paddies do. A boy like that can't have meant, seriously, to take his life.'

'He was probably nervous,' said Ernestine after an interval. 'And he only had a bicycle-lantern. He might have missed.'

She still spoke non-committally: but Rick discovered that she disagreed with him. Later, though, when he looked at Iveagh, the shooting business bothered him again. And when he saw the two brothers together, jerking remarks at one another in the worst of English, with their backs half-turned, and making no attempt at all to be agreeable to his wife,—he found it still harder to believe the dramatic scene by bicycle-lamplight had ever taken place at all.

Rick's family had lived for generations in and about the little town or big village of Holmer Hatch in Berkshire; indeed they had been known there long before the Wickfords; for it was only on her husband's entrance into office that the Duchess, then young and notable, took to inhabiting Holmer House. The Duchess, whose married mission it had been to rout out and red up things that had been misused and overlooked in the dark period of her predecessors, having had a go (we regret to be driven to such terms) at Castle Wickford and the Irish tenantry, and having been completely baffled and borne down by the soft atmosphere of contented incompetence that breathes across that beautiful land, turned her attention in despair to the oddments of English property, and thenceforth kept it there. Holmer, she informed her husband, was a sweet place, and had been strangely neglected. The house was ugly and uncomfortable, the park shabby and stodgy, the place was out-of-the-

way with few trains to it, and those at most unfashionable hours,—still, such simple obstacles are merely inspiring to a vigorous mind. Much, she told the Duke, might be done for Holmer. It might be ‘made,’ as a residential district.

She proceeded to make it, the Duke being too busy to attend to her. She made everything, even a station and railway time-table eventually: not by means of money, for the Suirs were anything but rich, but by the power of a personality. She made the grounds, she made the drive, she made the motor high-road. She even made the Duke and her silly sons, all three sighing for Ireland, live at Holmer. She made the school (for which the sand) and the schoolmistress (a worthy girl), and she made, inevitably, various dissensions and seams in the rural peace; because—alas—the Duchess made favourites. She had a benevolent plan, in the first instance, of making Mrs. Redgate, then young and new-married. Only Mrs. Redgate, entering her defences in the first half-year, made friends with her instead. Thereafter the Duchess laid by her fashioning-tools, in the case of Ernestine: borrowed receipts from her, received her in gardening-clothes, told her all her troubles, and took lessons from her, imperceptibly, upon how to entertain.

The Duke’s death, which shook the Duchess’s whole well-built being far more than she ever admitted to the world at large,—for she draped herself at his demise superbly, regarding the shattering blow to her private prospects proudly and steadily as a loss to the nation,—gave a fresh impulse to this remarkable friendship with a younger woman, a person of no pretension at all. It was a fact that, during the first years of her loneliness, the Duchess sought Ernestine much more

than Ernestine the Duchess. It was even rather awkward for her young neighbour at times. Ernestine was independent, and had no wish at all to be flooded and pursued by the whole new department of society Gertrude represented, above all by that 'Oxborough gang' with whom Gertrude was by birth bound up, and of whom she was a shining light. The Oxboroughs were ponderous and pugnacious,—hoofs and horns,—and Ernestine liked her hands free. It was not that she dreaded patronage, being by nature incapable of being patronised: it was simply she disliked being hustled and walked upon by a number of people for whom she had no use. It was an infinite relief to her when, after a prolonged quiet resistance on her part, Isabel, the sister-in-law, gave out as her astonishing judgment that she was an artificial little lay-figure, all clothes; and the Oxboroughs,—leaving her to poor Gertrude, whom widowhood had sadly weakened,—*barged* off (to borrow a useful image from their nephews' vocabulary) in another direction, snorting and shouldering aside more modest craft.

The Duchess, thus left alone, shone in her true light, which was not really disagreeable, as the many innocent comments hitherto recorded upon her will bear witness. She was a 'useful woman,' and would have been a nice one, if she had been content to let others exist usefully, or uselessly, according to their ideas. She was extremely generous on a comparatively small income; only, reckoning the resources of others with fearful exactitude, she required them to be generous in a just proportion. They must do no more, nor less, than that:—else the Duchess really could not think highly of them, nor ask them to tea.

She was, also,—really by no fault of hers,—a rude

woman : rude, of course, in the name of that ill-treated female, Truth. Further, she was stiff-necked beyond belief, above all when (owing to a slight oversight) fate or her following, her dear son Wickford above all, proved her wrong. Once really launched on an ill-judged course of her own choosing, the Duchess could be stupid : we shall have occasion later to exhibit this. Otherwise she was quite a clear-sighted person : was to be found right in the middle and well to the forefront of all the charitable movements, local, national, or international, that were justice-seeking and righteous, whether popular or not : and expressed herself in public, especially impromptu, ten times better than Wickford junior could ever have done, in this world or the next.

Thus much of the *grande dame* who sat upon the society of Holmer Hatch, at the period when M. du Frettay, cheerful of tongue and spirit, easy in his impudent national bearing of indifference to Duchesses and dairymaids alike, so long as they failed to please his private taste, was ushered in among its ingredients. He rapidly picked up all accessory details about her : indeed, he had some idea he had known all about her in advance. She was much, he gathered, what anyone of intelligence from across the Channel would have guessed. It was only her sons, as belonging to her, who disturbed him a little,—faintly deranged his fixed ideas.

‘The boys,’ as Sir George called Wickford and Iveagh,—titled elements of the British Peerage,—dropped in at Professor Marchant’s forest lodge the first morning ; not at all as if it was the proper thing to do, nor exactly because they wanted to see Professor Marchant, nor precisely because they were curious

about Professor Marchant's French visitor ; Gabriel, to his regret, was unable to make out any generalisation from their probably polite proceeding as to the habits of English society at large. They just came. Iveagh, having looked at du Frettay in the station, brought his brother along to look at him too. They appeared, sat about, chaffed one another, exchanged news, and—especially in the person of Iveagh—asked questions. They asked questions about Marchant's young forest, and about the mechanical drawings on which Gabriel was engaged. They both said *Why?* and *What?* more times than is customary, in France, at first acquaintance ; and said it with the *h* a little prominent, in fact, in front of the rest. They found out a quantity of Gabriel's past history, not at all intentionally on his part, and when Iveagh asked casually—'*Why* had he come across ?'—he very nearly told him. All but disclosed a secret,—a French one : brought himself up with a jerk. . . . They had quite common clothes on, and dirty boots. They were respectful to the Professor,—here was something to notice ! Undergraduates, in England, are respectful to Professors with a great P. Good ! Dukes, in England, are—Dukes do—Dukes say— Well, when Wickford was quite gone, du Frettay remembered with a start that he was one. And what are you to make of a society which introduces its foremost figure to you like that ?

They left again with no courtesies, beyond that of proposing to du Frettay to walk back with them, and 'pick up' Mrs. Redgate ; a proposal which, owing to his business and the fact that it was raining hard, he refused.

'Come to lunch,' added Iveagh. 'Mother isn't there.'

Wickford had the grace to raise his eyebrows at this,

—otherwise that was literally all the evidence as to the Suir boys' notable mother he gathered from them.

Du Frettay refused, of course, yet more distinctly. It was barely a decorous proposal, since their lady mother was not at home, and he had not formally made the family's acquaintance. He was older than either of them, and knew perfectly and completely what to do. Only, when they had quite gone, whistling to a dog or two, Gabriel rather regretted his decorum. There was that (in Iveagh especially) which destroyed decorum, and conscience too. Marchant, though clever company, was of a certain age, fixed in his habits, and fussy slightly. The Suir boys possessed a fund of youth as indifferent and impudent as Gabriel's own,—in Iveagh's case more so. And though Wickford the land-owner had on his brow certain lines of enforced sobriety, he was not fussy or finicking,—oh no! Outside Mr. Marchant's front door, he walked backwards straight into a pool of golden mud collected round the roots of one of the baby trees, and splashed himself from head to foot. Whereupon he roared with laughter, and his very much younger brother said—' You ass ! '

In short, when the ' boys ' had vanished, du Frettay missed them. He began to wish he had gone with them and the dogs, and dashed his diagrams, even at the risk of splashing himself. He remembered also, a little later, that ' Sir-George ' in London had said he would like Iveagh. Well,—' Sir-George ' was a gentleman of parts.

IV

THE DUCHESS DEALS FAITHFULLY

THE Duchess came down next day, by the right train,—the other one,—having collected opinions upon Wickford's City speech in all the proper quarters. Gabriel had forgotten to ask after that speech, in the Duke's own society, but the Duchess soon let him know.

He came upon her, all unprepared, in Mrs. Redgate's drawing-room, where he was paying his duty-call, and neatly avoided a pitched battle with her in the first five minutes. His manners were beautiful; still, for the first time, absolutely the first since landing, he felt that subtle stirring of the national fur which occurs to the most careful of us at moments on the foreign soil. Gabriel's French fur, well-brushed, just quivered at the roots,—the Duchess's English spines being upright during the entire interview. Yet she fully approved of the young man, she told Ernestine afterwards, being adroitly flattered by him. She quite saw what George meant,—George, it seemed, had written to her. She only wished the boys would take example by his innumerable activities. He was (the Duchess was inclined to think) a useful member of society in the making,—if only he would abandon that air-nonsense, and take to bridges, like dear Mark.

And here it will be wise to mention that Captain Mark Elphinstone, the same that married Lise, was the

Duchess's relative, godson, and model young man. It was by no means his fault, and he was only too happy to marry Lise, and get out of range of the Duchess's patronage, and avoid being thrown continually at the head of the Duchess's sons. Young du Frettay, once or twice that morning, reminded her of dear Mark,—a certain look of intentness : the difference being that Mark showed it all the time, and this young fellow from Paris, rarely.

As for Gabriel, he contradicted her Grace flat once, in his most attractive manner, and refused her information steadily : but generally speaking he thought her ' typical ' in a truly exquisite degree, and let her alone. It is an immense consolation, *faute de mieux*, to put your adversary down as ' typical.' Think of the ready offence of telling the other party he is behaving in a ' truly English ' manner, or a truly Oxford (or Birmingham) manner, or yet better ' so like the family.' The worst case we ever noted of this was that of teacher telling pupil it was a ' thoroughly Fanny-ish ' thing to do. This last bit of impudent arrogance, on the teacher's part, should be added to the lists of libel, clearly, and brought before the law.

' Lady Wick,'—to use the young people's convenient extension of the Duke's nickname,—was a fair woman, rather worn-out, but still effective owing to her secure carriage, confident address, and the uncompromising directness of her regard. She had the insignificant features of the blonde, and fine hands, with a few quite superb rings upon them. She had been, in her youth, regarded as the prettiest and mildest of the Ox-boroughs : but middle-age, a coronet, and above all a widow's veil, had changed all that. Still, she had a sweet look occasionally, during a few playful passes

with Ernestine for example, for which du Frettay watched. He saw very well what she had been, and that of course always goes for something. If the Duchess had guessed the attentive young foreigner was excusing her in any degree owing to her past good looks, she would never have spoken to him again. At her present age, she had quite determined, clothes and appearance were nothing,—character and intentions were all. She made this evident in dress and discourse, with men particularly,—she rested unnecessarily upon it at times; especially since that vague autumnal charm of hers was quite handy, and sometimes eluded her strong control.

Wickford's speech, she informed them, had been pretty fair,—better than she expected, considering his great carelessness in co-ordinating his material. She thought Wickford was improving: he stammered less,—stood better,—

'Grand Dieu!' thought Gabriel: and tried to imagine his mother venturing to speak of him in such a manner in a stranger's hearing. She was, however, he gathered, proud of Wickford,—proud of what he represented, and what he ought to be. What Wickford was, Gabriel imagined he knew already a good deal better than the Duchess, though he had not been greatly struck by the elder Suir. He simply took, in that matter, the prerogative of one of Wickford's own generation. To her younger son, she never even alluded, and when Mrs. Redgate did so once, looked cold. Cold or worried, it was hard to say which. Maternal duty over-clouded her. The remark concerning her family's relative disadvantages, after Gabriel's departure, was the nearest she approached to the subject.

Finally, as to the expected hospitality,—George was George, and of course she invited Gabriel. She invited him immediately, the second thing she said. She might be said to claim him. Owing to a very full timetable, the following month, he had better leave the Marchant place at once, and come to her.

‘I am with Mr. Marchant for this week,’ said Gabriel blandly. ‘I have promised him.’

‘Oh. . . . You are not on business?’

‘No, Madame.’

An interval. Well then, he had better fill in the intervening period somehow or other, and come to them in February. It was a pity, because Wickford would be busy then. As for the interval, he had better—(she debated how to dispose of him safely)—he had better come to Ernestine.

‘*Merci infiniment*,’ said Gabriel. He looked at Mrs. Redgate, who simply smiled, that nice smile of hers, with just one hint of girlish mischief in it. They exchanged in that look a complete understanding. Ever since it had been Gabriel’s fate, that morning, to enter Hatchways ground, he had been longing for nothing so much as an invitation, just as Sir George had said. Still—of course—this would never do! If it were only for Lady Wick’s instruction, Gabriel could not have this.

‘A thousand thanks,’ he said. ‘I have to be in London, as it occurs, these few next weeks. I have some business to manage for my principals at the Offices.’

‘For your Chief?’ said the Duchess. ‘Which offices?’

‘The Admiralty.’

‘What business?’ said the Duchess.

Now, it may have been the total lack of a preliminary *h*, but the Duchess's 'which' and 'what' were singularly different from her son Iveagh's. Gabriel had no inclination, nor yet the smallest intention, of telling her what his business was. He temporised prettily, skirmished about in dialogue, and said smart things.

The lady of the manor could not understand him. She tried to take hold of sense in what he said, to seize plain facts, but he was unseizable. Yet he seemed to be stating things, plenty of them, and he spoke remarkably good English. It was then that she made up her mind that dear Mark's unvarying intentness was preferable. That solid ground is preferable to volatile air, she added to the conviction. She put him down as a young man from Paris, simply, during the whole of that interlude. She was herself betrayed into rudeness,—direct incivility,—which she had not at first intended. So—in short—M. du Frettay scored.

However, she secured something. Gabriel would come to her, by the usual train, on a certain date, and Iveagh should meet him. The Duchess liked to look ahead. If he could by any means dislodge George,—could he tell her what George was really doing? M. du Frettay, portentously serious, dared not say. Would he undertake to uproot George, and bring him down simultaneously for a country rest? M. du Frettay, with frivolous blue eyes turned to Ernestine, begged to be excused such responsibility.

'What is he doing?' said the Duchess. 'Stupid man! I believe Ernestine knows.'

'We none of us know,' said Ernestine.

'Isabel does so want to meet him,' said the Duchess. Isabel was Lady Oxborough.

‘Poor Isabel,’ said Ernestine. ‘I hope she’s better, Gertrude. Oh,’ she added, ‘there’s Rick.’

So, with Rick, the interview concluded. Rick, bulky and beaming, with a clever head, relieved guard, taking the Duchess on in capable style. Mrs. Redgate and M. du Frettay, leaving them to hammer at parochial affairs, took a turn about the Hatchways grounds.

‘Ouff!’ said Gabriel, when he was outside the drawing-room windows, which constituted the way into the garden. He had a fair excuse for saying ‘ouff!’ for the faint spring air creeping out of the hazel copses was delicious. But only a fair excuse, since he had just left the Duchess in the drawing-room.

‘Those are my five larch-trees,’ said Ernestine. ‘And Professor Marchant says I must cut the crooked one down!’

But there was a little, little dimple in the cheek nearer du Frettay as she said it. Was that the answer to his ‘ouff’ concerning her dear friend?

Hatchways was lovely—lovely—lovely. No words even of Gabriel’s own tongue could be good enough. French words sprang up in him, delicate epithets, suggestive turns, in prose or verse. All the epithets were pretty ones, and described what he saw precisely: yet they did not serve. He saw at once what every intelligent invader is willing to admit, the individual genius of the land invaded. And Ernestine at his side, without saying anything to remember, or seeming the least remarkable, centralised and perfected these wandering influences. Everything, he was somehow sure, that England has both of strange and sweet, was represented in her.

‘But what a Heaven!’ he said, in vigorous fashion,

stopping short at the entrance to the woodland path.

‘People like it,’ she said. ‘People who come down.’

Yes, that was her spirit, not proprietary so much as intendant, for others. For anyone,—wherever the English exclusiveness was, it was not here. Hatchways was inclusive, its arms were wide. Du Frettay noted his hostess’s own beautiful arms in her simple dress,—it was the only personal beauty of hers that reached him, that day, since he thus figuratively expected it. They were strong for protection, not for mastery. There was no hint about her of aggressiveness, of any of the kinds, class aggressiveness, sexual, or national. She appeared content, but not an enclosed contentment. Even the innocence he was given to expect of an Englishwoman was not ‘cloistered,’ as her Puritan poet said. It was large, and expanding. All her presence proclaimed a tranquil growth, like a forest tree.

All the same she was a little shy, or retiring : and so was Hatchways. One felt abnormally settled there, surrounded. How it was, or whither to be sought,—whether in the sleepy time of year, the heavy earth, the dripping trees, all plants tucked away in winter quarters and clothing, so that one longed to snuggle like them into the moss,—whether in that not far-distant, never far-distant sea, sighing and sucking at the coast-line, the stranger could not say. Du Frettay had seen the wrinkled back of that sea-serpent from far above ; he had noted the silver ribbon of the Manche, with its foamy frill, and speculated on the difference it might make, the difference it was said to make, in national and imperial propensities. Now he felt the difference,

that was all : it crept into his consciousness. Selfish—content with themselves—of course they were ! So were the angels, secure in Paradise. No wonder other invaders, Normans and Romans in the past, having got so far,—reached Hatchways,—seen Mrs. Redgate,—troubled to go no further. Why, for his own part . . .

‘ Can I really come here ? ’ said Gabriel suddenly. He would not have thought of so inviting himself anywhere, in France.

‘ I think,’ said Ernestine, quite easily, ‘ you had better go to Gertrude first. She expects it.’

‘ Get it over ? ’ Pause. ‘ Are there many,’ he pursued, having reached the wood, ‘ already taking treatment ? ’ She glanced round at him. ‘ On your premises.’

‘ Visitors ? No, not this week. Rick and I are alone.’

‘ Are you not dull, alone ? ’ he asked slyly.

Ernestine shook her head. ‘ I could wish,’ she laughed, ‘ we were duller. Christmas, you know. We’re not clear of a parish Christmas yet. And Gertrude has been away so much——’

‘ And you do her duties.’

‘ Some of them,—she lets me. I have her children to-morrow.’ She added—‘ You know about that.’

‘ Yes, I am coming to that. Miss Courtier asked me.’

‘ Do, because Rick can’t. Rick’s so rushed at the beginning of the year. If you have nothing to do,’ she added.

‘ Nothing more useful ? ’ said Gabriel with a reminiscence.

‘ Nothing nicer,’ said Ernestine.

‘ I have nothing nicer to prevent my coming to

Hatchways,—no. . . . Madame,—listen. I am supposed, while here in England, to be resting.’

He had her full glance at once. ‘Have you been ill?’

‘Not precisely. I was run-down.’ He plumed himself on this expression. ‘I think I was very run-down, unhappy,—enough to need a cure. When I have been running anew over London, to the Offices, all these weeks, my condition—ouff!’

‘You must go to Gertrude first.’ She smiled at his expression, as of a rueful child. ‘Will you help me in a plot, Monsieur?’ she asked. ‘I want Sir George. I don’t want him to go to Holmer. I think he is really tired of London,—he hates it,—he told me: and he likes coming. Once I had him, and he said it did him good.’

‘He is consumed,’ said du Frettay fervently, ‘with a passionate longing,—pining for Hatchways whenever he thinks of it. But so shall I be by then undoubtedly. Madame, can I not come?’

‘Really!’ said Ernestine, and said no more for a time. They were walking in the wood, and since the visitor chose the way, walking was difficult. ‘You can’t mean you are afraid of Gertrude,’ she presently observed, looking at his fine young figure thoughtfully.

‘No, no, I am not shy.’

‘I didn’t suspect you of being shy.’

‘No? Had it not struck you? But it is growing on me,’ said Gabriel. ‘It is in the air,—in the blueness. I shall be as shy as Sir-George soon, and long like him to conceal myself—with your assistance.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Ernestine. ‘No Frenchman does.’

‘Not want to hide? Why not?’

‘ Because you are all made to show yourselves.’

‘ Tiens ! ’ said Gabriel. He had suspected it : still, it pleased him to hear it on a woman’s tongue, as it pleased him this woman should say it. She realised exteriors, anyhow,—not all of a saint, only part. Only the pleasant part.

He got out of the wood on the wrong side, with considerable stooping, holding back the hazel branches for Ernestine to do the like. Then he crossed a bit of marsh, where both had to step cautiously : then by a plank across a charming runnel over grasses called a ditch : and so through an unmended gap into a lane by a larch-wood.

‘ Now,—where are we ? ’ he demanded, pleased with his prowess.

‘ On the Duchess’s property,’ said Ernestine.

‘ Zut ! ’ said M. du Frettay.

V

ADELAIDE DOES OTHERWISE

AFTER that Gabriel plunged. He went head first into that mixed Holmer society, as the Suir boys seemed to require him to do. He made no distinctions, since they did not. He called, in Iveagh's company, on several people the following day, including the school-mistress (for the Duchess) and the gamekeeper (for Wickford) and the grocer (to buy chocolate, which was inferior) and the Rev. Canon Lionel Oxborough, four villages away (the same being the next best to a Bishop Iveagh could do for him, after thought).

The day after that, failing Iveagh engaged, he began to call alone, of necessity. He wanted to observe manners, and at Marchant's Lodge he saw nobody except its master, and at times the ubiquitous 'boys.' Most people he found at their own houses, and everybody at Mrs. Redgate's, which was treated by the young people, he discovered, as a kind of club. Only the Courtier household he failed with, since Adelaide's mysteriously absent mother made overtures at the family mansion a little difficult. Gabriel gathered there had been no open breach, only Mrs. Courtier found prolonged breathing-spaces in London desirable for her health: the while Adelaide, with a certain truculent valour he learned to admire, managed her handsome father, and lived down public opinion, in the intervals. Before anyone could really gossip danger-

ously, Mrs. Courtier came back (by the usual train) and smiled for a period upon the domestic hearth.

Gabriel collected this, the genuine scandal of the country-side, not from Ernestine, nor from Iveagh,—who did not willingly mention Adelaide,—but from Iveagh's mother when he went to tea. The Duchess did not figure badly as a gossip, once one learnt to manage her on her own lines. She liked Gabriel to tea,—he continued to make her think of Mark at intervals, nor could she deny him certain attractions of his own. She had to admit all kinds of things about him finally, as well as good manners and good looks, which by the Duchess's philosophy mattered least. It is probable though, in the case of Gabriel as of the original Mark, they went for something. M. du Frettay was a handsome young man, dare-devil and debonair in appearance, and in mere personal effectiveness he beat most of the local squires at Holmer hollow, including Rick and the Duke. He 'knew how to behave,' certainly more pleasantly than the Duchess's Oxborough brothers, and a good deal more prettily than her Suir sons. Indeed,—having mastered behaviour in all its branches by the age of seventeen, forgotten his manners deliberately in camp and at the schools, picked them up again and brought them, during a short intensified experience of the social world, to a high pitch of perfection,—Gabriel was a little puzzled by the Suir boys' lack of any manners at all. Combined with their friendliness, which attracted him, their bluntness, especially to women, often gave him shocks.

Gabriel regarded the Suir boys, of course, as English ; he lumped them together, a still worse mistake to those who really knew Wickford and Iveagh, and proceeded to generalise from them, steadily, about England at large.

They reminded him of the fact that the English fail everywhere, not in material, but in technique. Their material, in character as in food-stuffs, is very fine. One has, however, but to dwell (and dine) for a short period among them, to realise the French genius for manipulation, for presentment, even of an inferior thing. The English attitude 'not worth it' to an inferior thing, is hardly known in France. Technique can always make it worth. This, applied to cookery, is a commonplace: but it goes deeper, to character. At the worst you learn young, across the Channel, how to present yourself,—at the very worst. At the best, such as Gabriel—

Look at Iveagh. It was ages, that is two months, before owing to a remark of Mrs. Redgate's, Gabriel learnt the essential, almost staggering fact about him that he was desperately in love with a married woman,—a fact which would simply have saved him, once for all, in du Fretay's eyes. . . . Look at Wickford. It was not till Gabriel had stopped knowing Wickford altogether, and gone back to France, that he solved the problem of his constant preoccupation, and absences from Holmer headquarters, by the facts that he was sorting material and practising oratory (at which he could not possibly shine), not in the interests of that Hereditary House of his, whose privileges, at the time, were gravely threatened: but in those of the docile, or Unionist (questionably absurd) element in his native island. That he was, in short, the very Orange-man, to whom Sir George had once slyly alluded. And Gabriel had been near him, at his elbow for weeks! Such opportunities of sympathy and confidence, of self-improvement,—of satire,—completely missed!

Well—then there was the little matter of the Duke's

marriage with Miss Courtier. Gabriel, thanks to the Duchess, was extremely well up in the details of this nice arrangement, carefully planned to suit all parties, well discussed by Wickford's mother, with Miss Courtier's, whenever that lady happened to be about. The Duchess had a strong partisanship, closely resembling partiality, for Mrs. Courtier, whose domestic troubles had her full sympathy. She was a charming woman (Gabriel learnt), much set upon by Fortune. She acted cleverly too, her spirit in so constantly going to London being only equalled by her saintly good sense in coming back. Her lineage also was what it should be, and her fortune large. All of it was settled on her only child, whose father also intended to dower her handsomely,—dear Adelaide having, with quite irreproachable motives, kept in with each side.

M. du Frettay's trained intelligence followed all this perfectly. It was a situation to be treated with tact, evidently, but his course was clear. Having said all the right things to Wickford's mother, and noted her gratification,—having observed at every turn the easy, almost daughterly bond that united Miss Adelaide to Holmer House,—he proceeded, with all courtesy and caution, to congratulate her and the Duke. . . . With what result? Wickford, with a little twitch of mouth that was habitual with him, left an interval, and changed the subject. Miss Courtier, at the pointed praises of Wickford that were handed her, and accompanying hint at her happy fortune as his noble bride, enquired with a laugh—'where on earth he had picked *that up?*'

'From the Duchess,' said du Frettay. 'Perhaps I intrude?' he added cheerfully: and finished, with an expression he had been recently cultivating—'My mistake.'

'A bit off it, for once,' chaffed Adelaide, who had, however, changed colour a little. 'Wick and I are old friends, M. du Frettay. He told me his scrapes at school. Not that he had many,—he was such a good little boy. Iveagh was a sight more interesting.'

'Ah.' Gabriel took it in. 'But surely,' he hinted, 'if the alliance were presented, a *chose faite*, you could not set yourself against?'

Adelaide blushed again. 'Really, you have ideas! It can't be settled, unless I settle it. The *chose* would be *faite* by me,—Mother and the Duchess might wish themselves blue in the face. I should decide as I thought right in the matter, without their putting their oar in.'

'Oar,' said Gabriel, noting the sporting idiom. But he noted absently, for he was perplexed. The Duchess, he could not but feel, was right, and more than right. A handsome, healthy girl: brilliant, he presumed,—he could not follow all her expressions, but her way of talking had the effect of wit: 'born,' of course,—her mother strung the 'honourable' before her name: a trifle boisterous, but that would be, for Wickford's eminently English taste, an added attraction. Certain squireens of the neighbourhood called Miss Adelaide to him a 'flyer.' M. du Frettay, as a flyer himself, felt a professional sympathy. He pressed at once for a definition of the term, which he assumed was complimentary.

Only of course the last thing the squireens could do was to define: they sniggered merely. Gabriel picked out a fairly intelligent specimen, Sam Coverack, and with great and careless art, brought up the subject.

'Addy's everything her own way nowadays,' said

Mr. Coverack. 'Since Lise dropped out, I mean. Lise Fitzmaurice,—she married, y'know.'

'Aha,' said Gabriel, who had heard of Lise.

'Lise dished Addy's little game every time,' said Mr. Coverack. 'Did it o' purpose, for the lark. You ask Mrs. Redgate.'

'Dished,' murmured Gabriel.

'I'd back Addy now to bring down the Duke,' said Sam, 'in spite of the Duchess.'

This was delightfully straightforward: though 'bringing down,' in such a case—well, sporting again.

'But the Duchess upholds the union,' suggested Gabriel. 'She backs it, as you say.'

'That's what I mean,' grinned Sam.

'And the young lady, I think, is not adverse,' said Gabriel, regarding him intently.

'That's your idea, is it?' said Sam.

'I see.' Gabriel smiled. 'You mean, if her Ladyship had the perspicacity to oppose, she would attain her objects the more rapidly.'

'I dare say,' said Sam, amazed at this language, 'that is what I meant.'

'Yes, yes,—indeed, our side also I have heard examples—' Gabriel saw an objection. 'But your Lord Wickford is not like that. He has not the spirit. No, nor the other, either. I cannot imagine to that family the spirit for revolt, for initiative,—for passion above all.'

'Spirit?' said Sam. He stared. 'I'veagh, are you alluding to?'

No more was said, at least in the personal vein. The squireen being stupid, and of course, friends with those Suirs, Gabriel smoothed it over. He discovered rapidly how impossible it was to criticise either of the

brothers, in the native or rustic community. Nor was it tuft-hunting (see Thackeray's work) the least, it was simply because everybody liked them. Gabriel himself, if you came to that—still, of course, one must investigate.

The conversation turned on hunting, Sam saying—really, it was time du Frettay got an idea how things shaped in the hunting field. If he would take Sam's advice. . . . Gabriel, knowing Mr. Coverack to be a past expert in the national sport, and being intent on doing all things to a turn as they were done at Holmer, took it willingly.

Thus he next saw his little world on horseback, and certainly, his ideas shifted a little. Adelaide, it was true, was handsomer than ever, adequately mounted in her elegantly simple garb of cloth. But, oddly enough, though she was the only woman out that day, in an excellent humour, and more than willing to be gracious, Gabriel could not keep his thoughts upon her. He was a judge of riding, if of nothing else in the day's amusement, and the Suir brothers, not to say the horses they bestrode, claimed his strict attention.

But what disturbed his ideas yet more was that Iveagh detached himself. He would not be lumped with Wickford any longer, though he opened the day quietly at his brother's side. A hitherto undreamed-of inspiration radiated from Iveagh, and his wonderful little mare, which had been Lise's,—seized the hearts of the hunt, and carried them with him when the moment came. It was not only that he rode superbly—Wickford did that too. Both had been born to the saddle,—born *in* the saddle, one might almost say: for Iveagh had been riding something or other in Galway

at three years old. They both had the slight compact nervous make of the inevitable centaur,—the steady eye, strong thigh and light hand,—but Iveagh had more. He had, to mention nothing else, the intense, almighty seriousness of his race, when engaged in this particular sport, or art. The whole of his ideas, hopes, faiths, including the Lise department of him, which the little mare contributed, were strung up, concentrated, consecrated to one absorption alone. That the absorption was a little yellow fox might have seemed to du Frettay ridiculous, had not *his* ideas, hopes, intentions and intelligence been concentrated on doing like the English, looking, and if possible thinking like them.

For it will barely be credited that, with Lise's Emer to show the way, and Whiskylegs (well-christened) to carry him, and Wickford's Playboy, third of the line and name, cantering sweetly at his side, M. du Frettay still thought the star he was following was an English one, simply because it was not French!

It is true, he noted few peculiarities new to him in Iveagh Suir. His accent changed a little, as did Wickford's: both became a trifle harder to understand. The individual music of their tongues (which du Frettay had hitherto put down as Oxford, or aristocratic) stood out, minute by minute, in greater contrast with the throaty grunts of the squireens. Since both were slangy at the best of times, this meant that across country the Suir boys became cryptic completely. It was hard on an enquiring Frenchman, who ached to pick up hunting terms. . . . Also, the English huntsman being red in the face, as everybody knows, Gabriel noticed that in great heat and excitement, Iveagh turned pale. He was really intensely pallid at one

point, when the dogs were baffled, snuffing round a horribly unsavoury ditch : sitting Lise's Emer tense and rigid, one hand on a quite impossible gate,—most of the other riders, apparently, attending to him. His small grey eyes were darkened too, and languid : he seemed sleepy a trifle, or bored, scanning his horse's neck and ears. Not long after, with a perfectly unintelligible remark to his brother, he circled about, took the impossible gate and the unsavoury ditch in one, to Gabriel's genuine terror, and trotted off peacefully down a little lane.

Gabriel, open-mouthed, turned to the Duke for explanation.

'The mare's had enough,' said the Duke ; and added lower, as for his own consolation—'The boy he is !'

He said it gravely, but with the little twitch of mouth that seemed to imply humour. Du Frettay, retreating to Adelaide, turned over these things.

The 'dogs' found soon after, so he had not immediate leisure to compare impressions with Miss Courtier, as he was quite longing to do, for she was bound to be behind-scenes as to the Suir boys' peculiarities, and their family affairs. The Duchess gossiped with her, and Wickford, if nothing else, was a close companion,—Gabriel was growing heedful, by now, with the term 'friend.' Also, she was always kind to himself, interested in his difficulties, and ready to patronise and instruct. Gabriel, whose nature stood no patronage from man, submitted to it from woman willingly. Indeed, he often acted more innocence than he possessed, in order that the pretty girls of the district should tell him things. His direct bright-eyed glance had the effect of innocence ; and all the young ladies

of his society, vigorously discussing him, had put him down as younger than the Duke.

To his surprise, when Miss Courtier came to realise the state of things with Iveagh, she changed colour with vexation, reining back her horse.

‘I never heard such nonsense!’ she ejaculated, in Wickford’s direction. ‘A run like this. . . . But that’s Iveagh all over,’ she added, rather viciously. ‘Why you *let* him—Emer was all right.’

‘I can’t prevent him, if he chooses,’ said Wickford.

‘An Englishman,’ observed du Fretay, ‘cares for his horse as his mistress,—I have heard that.’

Adelaide giggled, and Wickford very slightly frowned. Soon after he rode forward, abandoning Adelaide to Gabriel.

‘I never knew such things as you say,’ said Adelaide, turning an open smile to him, when they were alone.

‘What did I say?’ said Gabriel.

‘Oh, never mind. I should be careful with Wick, though, when the kid’s in question. That’s a tip, and I make you a present of it.’

‘Thank you,’ said Gabriel, ‘but I had observed.’ He proceeded, with Adelaide in this unbending mood, to other enquiry, airing such little points of interest as had come up during the day. As to the question of the hunting-complexion, Miss Courtier was amused.

‘Pity my respected father’s not out,’ she said. ‘He’s got a shade might suit you.’ Gabriel was rather shocked by this. It is hardly filial in a fair girl, of exquisite natural colouring, to taunt her father with his deficiencies. He shifted the subject to Iveagh’s huntsmanship.

‘Ride?’ said Adelaide. ‘Like a jockey, doesn’t he? It’s hardly respectable. I told Lady Wick, at the

worst, they'd take Iveagh in a training-stable,—he goes light enough. Put the Duchess's back up, rather. I don't see why he shouldn't make his living that way as well as another, if he's got to.'

'Ah,' said Gabriel. 'But has he got to make a living?'

'Oh, rather! A younger son, you know. It's not all skittles to be even a Duke, in these days,' said Miss Courtier easily. 'Wick's pretty bothered about things at times.'

'Aha,' said Gabriel,—his little sound of apprehending. He pondered of Dukes, death-duties, and the democratic reaction. He made a mental note on another page, as it were, and proceeded.

'Then what,' he enquired, 'is Lord Iveagh to do?'

'Stinks,' said Miss Courtier.

'Plaît-il?' Gabriel was caught off his guard.

'That's what the boys say. You're learning something this morning, aren't you? Science, and physics, and all that. He was rather smart, at Eton. At Oxford he played the fool,—came a cropper,—you know that, don't you?'

Gabriel knew, he had heard as much from Marchant already; only he was not, somehow, inclined to seek an explanation from Adelaide. Her constant innuendoes in Iveagh's direction perplexed him,—some clue or connection was lacking, to his logical mind. All the time he chaffed with her easily, he was searching about for it.

'He used to be keen on collecting,' pursued Adelaide. 'Botany and so on's his style,—he calls it something different, but it doesn't matter. Whatever you say you're never right with scientific people, are you? Both of them are nuts on natural history—' Gabriel

was taxed, really, to keep up with her images. 'Iveagh'll travel, probably.'

'To be sure.' Gabriel grasped this, remembering what Sir George had said anent young men whose families required to get rid of them. But why should Iveagh's family so require?—young as he was, and useful, certainly. He was used by everybody, Gabriel had observed, like a servant almost, and, though odd in his ways, was far from incompetent. There was room for a boy admittedly 'smart,' on the large and hampered home estate, either as secretary or overseer,—one would have thought. But this was England!

'Does his mother wish him to travel?' he asked soon.

'Oh, Lord,—anything to get rid of him, I should say.' Gabriel's brow knitted. 'Lady Wick,' pushed on Adelaide, 'has had enough of Iveagh, between you and me. I quite agree,—it's time he cleared off, hanging about like this. . . . Wick's not so sure.'

'Not so sure he should go? Why not?'

'Oh, fussy. He says it's a beastly climate, wherever it is they want him to go. I never remember names. Wick's a donkey, really,—he's so nervous.'

'But why not, for his brother?' reasoned du Frettay. 'A man would be.'

Adelaide thought differently, but she said nothing. She was looking sulky, which really implied she was debating how far she could go. She held plenty of material, only it was private, and Wickford was a stickler in the matter of confidence. Yet she was not above the temptation to gossip,—real gossip,—with so handsome and pleasant a partner. To have a new man of any kind to impress with her knowledge of the Duke's family secrets was something. So she

sulked, looking down. M. du Frettay, annoyingly at his ease, rode and enjoyed the view.

‘Like to know what I believe,’ she said at last, pressing her horse nearer to du Frettay’s. ‘It’s only guess-work, really, for Wick’s not easy to see through when he chooses to shut up on certain subjects. I believe he’s afraid of Iveagh drinking, if he goes out,—taking to drink, you know. That’s in the family, as it happens,—and people in the tropics do.’

‘Psst!’ said du Frettay, startled. It was a bit of complete new light on some things he had observed, and Sam Coverack had conveyed to him equally. His respect for the Duke’s intelligence was increased at once, and the respect, which was already there, for his fraternal affection also. He made no comment, though, whatever, beyond the single exclamation. To Adelaide’s surprise, and not a little to her resentment, he ‘shut up’ precisely as Wickford did, in this matter,—which might be almost jocular, she thought,—of Iveagh drinking in the wilds.

His kind of Frenchman, Adelaide decided, was disappointing. Gabbler as he was—as all of them were—the last thing she had supposed of him was that, thus invited, lured to the most suggestive confidences, he should fail to ‘rise.’ She would not have thought he could control, even if he would, the spring of his insensate curiosity. He who was always poking about, explaining things which required no explanation, displaying jets of unexpected knowledge of common friends, highly amusing under their foreign colour . . . it was flat of him, really, to fall off like that!

Du Frettay, riding home, referred himself, then and there, to Mrs. Redgate for explanation. He need trouble no more to speculate, since she held the threads,

for certain, of all he might seriously need to know. Should he need, as friend, to hear the facts of Iveagh's story, she would not fail him. He could himself have produced two or three conjectures, none of which would have been far from the truth of the little mystery. Lise was not there yet, quite, but he adumbrated Lise. His experience adumbrated another woman from Adelaide's manner to Iveagh simply, persistently impatient and unkind: from her darkened brow when she censured his folly in dropping out of the sport he loved, when the best run of the season was in progress. Even for the Oxford *débâcle*, otherwise cropper, the dear distraction necessary to account was there, shadowing sweetly in the whole talk of this district concerning her. What else was there, Gabriel argued, that the world holds, to divert a man's thoughts from work he was said to love, and sport he was seen to grace so perfectly? Quite apart from any little stirring of sympathy for the boy so derided, reason arrives at these things. Du Frettay, a man who loved his work with almost romantic ardour, cherished for it a secret devotion beside which all but the greatest and deepest passions paled, could reason it as well as another.

He began too, clever as he was, to suspect the grouping, as well as the goddess or elf unseen: the phalanx that was gathering about that boy to protect him,—to save, in the only real sense of the word, his life. And in that faithful phalanx, Miss Courtier was not, he gathered: nor Iveagh's lady mother, could it be? And Wickford was, rightly to Gabriel's ideas: and Sir George the good lion, probably: and more sure, more natural, more right than any,—Ernestine Redgate in the midst of it.

VI

HOLMER IN TRIBUNAL

MISS COURTIER was right, at least, as to the material side of affairs at Holmer. Having caught things from the Duke, at odd seasons when his natural frankness led him to confide : having caught other matters from her mother, when that lady had been sitting and sighing for a period in the Duchess's pocket : and since this practical young lady considered that it might very well, at some future time, concern herself, she was pretty well up to date as to the condition of the Ducal finances.

We have mentioned in passing that the Duchess of Wickford, *née* Oxborough, once launched on a course of her own devising, was considerably hard to turn. We have called her stiff-necked in certain situations, such as when her son presumed to manage her. Now, the Duchess's own fortune, not a prodigious, but yet a pretty one, was settled on her younger son. During the short period of Wickford's minority,—he was nineteen when his father died,—his mother had had all things in her hands, and, with due respect to so downright a lady, had muddled them very tolerably. The young Duke, on coming to his own, took over the whole direction of his much-embarrassed heritage, with the exception of his mother's own property, which he left to her. He did not wish to do so, even then, knowing

his brother's future to depend upon it. He had an anxious eye that way, at times, in the years that followed, and more than once advisers whom he trusted pressed him to intervene. His mother was given to sudden enthusiasms, in life: '*elle s'emballait*,' as the French say, readily for the picturesque. This, though beautiful in life and love, is not encouraged by good counsellors when applied to financial investment, in the case of widowed ladies of just adequate means, especially.

Needless to say, the Duchess stood no attempt at intervention. Wickford's occasional observations, blunt as usual, though entirely well-founded and well-meant, drove her ever more obstinately along her chosen courses. Never, the Duchess wished her son to observe, had she admitted interference in this, her peculiar province.

'My father——' began Wickford.

'Your father never laid a finger on me in my private affairs,' said the Duchess.

She lied: but really, in the case of one's own son, one has to disguise the truth occasionally. That there are cases when loyalty to one's traditions, and the dignity accruing to age, urges lying to one's children, the Duchess was convinced.

Wickford said no more; but he had, by the age of five-and-twenty, very complete control of the ragged remnant of the family fortunes, and its history both in the present and the past. Further, boy as he had been before his father's death, he had been entrusted with certain confidences that he could not, in his mother's presence, betray: so he knew she lied, perfectly. His father had not only attempted, but succeeded in restraining her, just where he was failing to

do so. He left the matter, with youthful philosophy, till the next occasion when he could get in a word. He did so regularly, once a year, for he was a conscientious person : but to little avail.

He suspected, when the smash came, it would be his fault,—but it was not, fortunately : it was the solicitor's and stockbroker's between them. His mother was only regretful that, doubtless with the best intentions, Wickford had not dispensed, once for all, at his father's death, with old Fullalove's useless services. As for the other dotard—but we will let that sleep ! The Duchess became, at the upset of her cherished plans, patient, sorrowful and resigned,—the plaything of fortune. She retreated into her widow's dignity,—having two sorts to choose from,—and spoke to Iveagh herself. She did not allow Wickford, still less the professional to do so. This was his mother's affair.

'I have no doubt,' said the Duchess in the maternal vein to Iveagh, 'that your brother will help you.'

'He will not,' said the Duke in the background. 'I've told him heaps of times he will get nothing out of me. I want all the money there is, and more.'

'I am glad, Wickford,' said the Duchess, after a pause of wondering whether she had not better at once admit the truth of this, 'that there are no strangers present to hear you make such statements.'

'There's all that needs,' said the Duke. He turned a page of the book he was reading on the chimney-piece while he warmed himself at the hearth.

The Duchess looked from one to other of them as they stood before her in the so-called back-drawing-room, the most habitable of the reception-rooms at Holmer : Wickford at the hearth, Iveagh at the

window, each half-turned away. They were, as usual, annoying her extremely, not in anything they said, so much as in their essence and general attitude. What was more, as usual, their small sensible eyes gleamed sympathy with, and approval of, one another.

'You had far better,' she resumed to Iveagh, 'avail yourself of my old friend Sir George's extremely promising offer, and go out to wherever it is with him.'

'I don't see,' said the Duke in the background, 'how that's to make a living for him,—however!' He put an elbow on the mantelshelf, a masterpiece of frightfulness in mixed marbles, as were nearly all the fittings of Holmer House.

'He can write a book,' said the Duchess.

'Yes, and who's to read it?' murmured Iveagh.

'I will,' said Wickford after a pause, 'granted it's good enough. But I'd sooner hear ye talk,—and I'd sooner still Sir George did.'

'Talked, or heard him talk?' snapped his mother. 'Really you had better speak better yourself, Wickford, before you try to direct other people.'

'I'm not trying to direct him,' said Wickford.

'You are,' said Iveagh, quietly and evenly.

'Well, I don't suppose for a minute you'll do what I direct.'

'No, you don't suppose that,' said Iveagh. 'It's the difference.' His eyes strayed.

'Iveagh,' said the Duchess monumentally, 'you are in an extremely obstinate state of mind. I will not, to my own son, say sulky. I don't know that your brother's showing himself so disobliging makes things any better,—and I allow for some disappointment, in this matter of the money. Indeed, the stupidity of that man Fullalove——' and so on, the Duke reading.

Iveagh seemed to find interest in the garden-view. 'I shall do my best,' she finished, 'in strict economy, for such of my life as may remain, to remedy——'

It was not intended for apology, and would not have become so probably, had her sons let her finish; but Iveagh, at whom she might have railed forever without effect, could not stand even the semblance of apology from his mother, especially in such terms. He and Wickford spoke simultaneously—

'I never supposed— He never supposed—'

Iveagh was husky, so the Duke got the word. 'He never supposed for a minute, Mother, he'd be independent of the ordinary efforts to get a livelihood. Don't think it,—I've seen to that. Besides which, if he was as rich as Croesus, he'd better work, and what's more he'd have to. I'm not wishing him Fortunatus for his own sake,' said the Duke, 'nor myself either, God knows——'

'You can speak in my presence without swearing,' said the Duchess. 'Well, go on. Let's hear what you propose for him, if it's to the point.'

'I'm not lecturing him,' said Wickford hastily. He turned about, book in hand. 'I wish for him what he wants, what he's wanting at this minute'—Iveagh's look shot round—'which is to get quit of us jawing him, jawing at him, what's worse. A man, worth a man, knows what he can do best, when he really has to do it. It's not a thing in which you can lead anyone by the nose——'

'If he had chosen to work at the proper age,' put in the Duchess, 'he would be in his country's service by this time.'

'Which country?' said Iveagh: only he spoke low. He was unusually non-politically-minded, for one of

his birth ; and though his rebellious sympathies had been enlisted young in the nationalist cause, Wickford swayed him. Any real conviction swayed Iveagh easily. He hovered, as a fact, between two extremes,—extremes being essential to his being,—except when his mother took the ancient-military Oxborough line. Then he knew, naturally, which to choose.

‘ I’d an idea he liked plants,’ pursued Wickford, ignoring the cross scent, ‘ and that’s on the skirts of Marchant’s business——’

‘ Marchant ? ’ exclaimed the Duchess. ‘ What now ? ’

‘ I thought you’d got to there,’ said Iveagh, across her. ‘ There or thereabouts. That young forest gets on your mind so, whenever you see Marchant, at least when I’m there too. To grow an oak-tree would be a great thing ’—he jerked about,—‘ granted you’d half a life to spare for it. About then you’d see your oak-tree flower——’

‘ Oaks do not have flowers,’ said the Duchess, impatient of this triviality.

‘ Then what about the acorn ? ’ rejoined Iveagh, without looking at her. ‘ However, you needn’t trouble, either of you. I’ll not go to Marchant, and bring up young forests,—no, I’ll not——’

‘ I see,’ said Wickford. ‘ Then what’s your idea ? ’

‘ I dare say I’ll go with Trenchard presently, granted he shows me reason,’ said Iveagh, ‘ and goes to the right place. Not just to get out of your way——’

‘ Don’t lose your temper,’ said his mother.

‘ Well, it does look like dismissing him,’ said Wickford. He added lower—‘ Dismissing untried.’

‘ Wickford, if you begin by discouraging his single

spark of natural energy and initiative, I ask you, where shall we get to?' said the Duchess.

'I'll go now, if Mother says it,' said Iveagh, taking her aback.

'I never said I wanted you to go,' she said. 'How tiresome you are, always taking offence. If you can find a respectable profession at home, I'd sooner you stayed——'

'What'll suit you, the Church?' said Iveagh: and went, by the garden window.

'He's not offended,' said Wickford, when he had vanished. 'He's hurt, it's not the same.'

'He's extremely absurd to be,' said the Duchess. 'I can't bear,' she pushed on, feeling for her original dignity, 'a proposal from a person like George, who really might be said to condescend in making it——'

'Certainly,' said her son as she waited.

'His serious proposal, for the boy's good, being treated like that. Childish huff, nothing better. It's intolerable.'

'I suppose,' said Wickford, 'you proposed it first.'

'And why do you suppose that?'

'Well, because certainly Trenchard would not jump at Iveagh. Why should he?—there are better men.'

'Well, and now you're back-biting,' said the Duchess after a pause,—she had prepared herself for another line of argument. 'Wherever will you be next, Wickford? I don't say George would jump, or whatever your expression is, at your brother. But I suppose I may take his own word he'd be pleased to have at his side a son of mine?'

'That's what I mean,' said Wickford quietly. 'He'd do it for your sake. The kid's been a handful, and is likely to be still, as none knows better than Sir George.'

'The discipline would be extremely good for him,' said the Duchess, rather acridly. 'George, in his fashion, is a martinet.'

'I know it. I'm not denyin' it. He'd do what he could,' said Wickford, changing posture, 'but always because you ask it.'

'What,' said the Duchess, 'is the object of talking like this? Is it your desire to throw the responsibility on me?'

'It is. Sooner than on Trenchard, anyhow. It's fairer so.'

'Fairer?' His back was turned to her again.

'Certainly,—if it fails.'

'Wickford,' said the Duchess, after a fresh silence, 'you are doing your best to insinuate things in this way, simply in order to disturb me. You've tried before. Just as though'—she was getting nervous—'in this wretched business of Iveagh's, I had not had disturbance and worry enough.' She waited, but still he was silent, an elbow on the marble shelf. 'What's the worst you think might happen to your brother, in my old friend's charge?'

'The worst's that he'd drink himself to death,' said Wickford, in an equal tone, like Iveagh's, that sounded indifferent.

'You've no right to——'

'And the best,' said Wickford, 'is not good enough to risk that. I'm sorry to repeat it, Mother, but I've said as much before.'

'You've no right to say such things'—she was asseverating anew.

'I've the right of knowing him. You needn't believe I like sayin' it. Knowing him—happening to know him desperate——'

‘Nonsense!’ rapped the Duchess, restored to power. ‘A love-affair at nineteen,—calf-love,—nobody dies of that.’ Silence. ‘Your father had plenty at that age, and I never thought the worse of him.’ Silence. ‘The girl’s married,—married a decent man, and done with, thanks to mercy. Luckily well out of the way, owing to——’ She nearly said—‘owing to my management.’ As a fact, Lise’s engagement to the ideal Mark had taken her distinctly by surprise. ‘You don’t suppose her attraction, at half a sphere’s distance——’

‘I do not suppose,—I know it,’ said Wickford.

Once more, and for the hundredth time, he reflected whether he could tell her about the shooting incident, and the other evidence of Iveagh’s indifference to life he held. It might straighten matters to offer such direct proof of his assertions,—only Wickford could not. To Mrs. Redgate he had been able, once and with an enormous effort to do so: but entering his mother’s confidence with such a story baffled him. ‘The kid trusted him not to’—that was what it came to. And besides—who could say how his mother would take it: in shame, anger, or mere impatience and disgust? Each was equally impossible to Wickford’s feelings. And if she attacked Iveagh on the subject, conscience-driven,—Good God—we fear Wickford swore again in spirit conceiving it.

He was not exaggerating, to his own mind, in this pressing anxiety about his brother. Iveagh had always, as he said, been a ‘handful,’ capable at intervals of outrageous things. He was born an *intransigent*,—it was all or nothing with him. Things must be just so, for Iveagh,—else, let others look out. In his first youth, no doubt owing to these implacable inward needs, he had had a terrific temper, and only his

father had been able to manage him. He grew past that stage of expressiveness, though he had had a few outbursts at school, enough to amuse Adelaide and the outsider, as has been seen. He did well at Eton in his latter years,—since his needs chanced to be the same as those of the authorities,—but, quiet as he was, and watchful-seeming, such as knew him felt the nature unchanged beneath. Then, just as he was done with scholastic rule, settling in his outlook, taking hold of life as he preferred, and preparing to build steadily, with a delicacy and caution inherited equally from the paternal stock,—Lise Fitzmaurice had come home from school in France.

No more was needed to shake the structure to its foundation again. Wickford, who had had himself in the early twenties an affair, completely unknown to his mother, with a beautiful young actress in London, was the only person fit, to Iveagh's ideas, to share some of these storms. Wick knew, at least,—Iveagh had seen him, how he was with Maidie. Maidie, naturally, was nothing to Lise,—still, Wick might know a thing or two without degrading Lise's image in transference.

Wickford, untiring in patience and kindness, had carried him through the worst. It had been hopeless, the boy's passion, almost from its outset. Lise, little puss, never seriously looked his way, and only looked Wickford's when she wished to annoy Adelaide. She played with Iveagh's sulky devotion, Celtic smoke and fire, tentatively until he wearied her; then she discovered her own affections in the nick of time, and pinned them to Mark: Mark the absolute, the sedate and serious,—and saintly, according to the Duchess, only not in fact. Iveagh had not even the consolation of despising Mark. He liked him originally, and with

the faith of a well-tempered spirit continued to do so. Mark's excellence only pointed more clearly the moral, the emptiness of all things, and the worthlessness of any course Iveagh might yet be expected, wanting Lise, to run. He might not even, as it shortly appeared, snap the rotten thread of his existence. Wick, at the critical instant, got in his way.

VII

HATCHWAYS AT TEA

IT was all this, or nearly all of it, that Ernestine communicated to Gabriel, so soon as she saw he was attracted, hanging, as it were, on the outskirts of the party she had instituted for Iveagh's spiritual recuperation and moral support. She did not let him see he was being so drawn in to the core of the real romance of the district : she made no untoward effort to secure his interest, still less to invite co-operation, which from a man and a foreigner she could hardly expect. She merely told him things, by degrees, that he really wanted to know.

Even so she did no wrong to Wickford's hard-wrung confidence ; she told him nothing about the shooting affray, and nothing about the increasing strain in her friend's family, which was Gertrude's business, not hers. And she only told him of the latest, or tropical terror of the Duke's, because Adelaide, to her sorrow, had already given that delicate secret away.

She waited for him to come to her, under her roof, before she enlightened him : and Gabriel also waited for that unconsciously, confident that it would happen in time. Both he and she, being busy people, had plenty of other irons in the fire. It was already March when Hatchways doors, or arms, really opened to him, though his heart had been planted beneath the larch-

trees long previously. He did his duty by his 'chief' in the interval, and his devoirs by the Duchess (who received him in London, finally), and had his fill of exploring and poking about. He was weighing several competing attractions for the Easter weeks when her note came, bidding him to Hatchways if he still cared for it ; and Gabriel dropped all the other things, just as Sir George had once advised him, and went down to Hatchways as soon as might be, by the usual train.

'He's the kind of nature takes to it easily,' said Ernestine of Iveagh, the second conversation they had. 'I think Wickford is right there,—drink or drugs.'

'Restive ?' queried du Frettay. 'Rebellious ?'

'Both. And he is very, very nearly at the end of his tether. Was,' she corrected. 'He is better now.'

'Angel,' thought du Frettay, as she looked abroad at the garden, leaning forward with her elbows on her knees, a most unstudied attitude which might have been a man's. 'Women are the devil,' he said, still to himself, but audibly. 'The number of souls they have lost,—oh, tossed away.'

'Saved too,' said Ernestine.

'Not so many,' he declared. 'Not nearly.'

'Mothers—' said Ernestine. He made a gesture, granting mothers. 'And mistresses,' she proceeded, with the simplest deliberation. 'Yes, often,—often.'

'Rarely,—rarely,' he mocked. 'I tell you, I know. It is not the common desire, to save. The common desire is to lead—*quoi donc ?*—to decoy by any means, to the devil sooner than nowhere. *Feu follet*,—what is your word ?—and my faith, as empty,—vacuous. Drink at least fills the void.'

She was silent, leaving it to him : she could not pretend to his experience.

'Adelaide should not have told you,' she thought, looking at his faintly mocking face, the cool glitter of his eyes: experience, not even such as Iveagh's, lay behind that. 'You were inclined to like him simply, those first days. Now you have been thinking in French about it. It was not right of Adelaide. And for her . . .'

'Do you know women who take drugs, Madame?' said Gabriel, right into her thought,—her start very nearly betrayed her. Her little flush might have done so as she answered—

'Yes, one or two.'

'For what reasons?'

'Oh, disappointment,—weariness.'

'Sometimes the hope to prolong their youth and brilliance,—chance of success?'

'Have you guessed that too?' thought Ernestine. But he was far from thinking of Adelaide. 'Women,' she said in her non-committal manner, rising, 'may be restive and rebellious, as well as men.'

'To be sure. And never so much, it appears,' said Gabriel, who had been looking about London, 'as when they have full freedom.'

Mrs. Redgate, who had risen to rearrange some flowers in a jar, stood still a moment. The remark struck her as clever. Nobody she had ever met struck her as so simply clever as this young man. He said things like that quite easily. Rick, who wrote critical articles for the *Times*, was less given to it. She debated it, comparing them equably,—so she forgot to reply.

'What a phrase-making fool I am,' thought Gabriel. We trespass on his thoughts like this, partly to fill up interludes, for he and Ernestine did not converse in any classical style. She did not talk, as Marchant con-

tended, she said things, and let say—‘elle disait et laissait dire.’ Gabriel knew he could say exactly what he liked, think aloud, which was a great comfort after the Duchess.

‘What was she like, the girl?’ he said, recollecting another question he wished to ask before the herd came; for it was approaching the mystic or club-hour of four o’clock.

‘Lise? Oh, I don’t think she flirted really,—I mean, not badly,’ said Ernestine. ‘She played a little, tried experiments,—she was only nineteen. Perhaps—mischievous.’ She dropped the word, dubious.

‘That is not mischief-making?’

‘No.’ She laughed. ‘I think not. You would have to see her, it is hopeless to describe. Lise was like water,—wonderful.’

‘Changeante?’

‘Yes. It is odd,’ said Ernestine, growing grave, ‘what appearance will do.’

‘It is miraculous what appearance will do,’ said M. du Fretay. Meeting his eyes she laughed again. ‘I can’t help it somehow,’ she said, ‘thinking of Lise. She was quite a dear, though. She writes to me.’

‘Is she happy?’ said Gabriel: and appended—‘Pardon.’ It struck him he asked too many questions, like Iveagh.

‘She married a good man,’ said Ernestine, carrying the jar of flowers to its place.

‘Ah,—*bon!* You answer me.’

Mrs. Redgate refused to smile any more: she had smiled enough. It is something, in life, to marry a good man, whatever he might choose to think. Take any case of the contrary. . . . And dear Lise—she

wrote nicely of Mark. And Mark was all he should be—not Iveagh. So thought Ernestine, differently from the Duchess, oppositely. The Duchess's way of thinking was, Iveagh was not Mark.

She excused herself to Gabriel, and left the room. She had often left him alone before on his visits, and he had no objection,—felt no blank, which was singular. He knew she was still there, of course, about the place.

'Everywoman,' thought Gabriel, remembering; and compared her with others that he had in mind. Soon he was thinking more about the others than about Ernestine. Not that she did not compare with all of them favourably, and not that he was not, during the whole period of his contemplation, wanting her back. Only—well, she was the least 'troublante' personage du Frettay had ever come across. She never troubled him, he only felt an occasional need of her,—perhaps a growing need. . . .

Presently 'the husband' came in.

'Where is my wife?' said Rick, looking over the spectacles, which he had lately taken to wearing, learnedly.

'I have no idea,' said du Frettay, waking.

'Where,' pursued Rick, looking about him, 'is the tea?'

'I have,' said du Frettay, with increased earnestness, 'no idea.'

Withdrawal on the part of Rick. Young or youngish men kicking their heels about his premises seemed nothing to him. His wife, and the tea, were all he came about: and he withdrew, contented, without either. . . . Singular household. Wonderful Hatchways. Marvellous England. . . . Du Frettay dreamed.

Presently, everybody came at once, by windows and doors, like an untidy stage entrance,—Adelaide's voice and presence prominent,—surely unnecessarily so! Sam Coverack and others followed her. The tea entered also, left centre. M. du Frettay, with his elegantly crossed legs, right centre, was no longer alone. Being M. du Frettay, however, he did not stir. Everybody else was stirring, so it was better not to do so.

'Well, I'm blest!' said Adelaide, stopping short. She pointed the finger of scorn at him. The company gathered to look at M. du Frettay, taking possession in this manner of Hatchways, their clubroom, in his new character as resident guest. He bore the infliction confidently,—one would have said he enjoyed it.

Iveagh alone seemed indifferent to his reappearance. He gave his hand, but hardly turned his eyes. He was sulky. Adelaide, who had attached Sam for the afternoon, had probably been teasing him. Now, having M. du Frettay, she dropped Sam also, for Sam's good. It was like that game of cards where you always exchange the less good for the better, as your turn comes round,—commerce, is it not called?

In the intervals of replying in kind to Adelaide, Gabriel tried to follow the dialogue of the two young men beyond her, Iveagh and Sam. Nothing could be less interesting. It was horses—horses eternally, and only remarks exchanged at that. That Iveagh, among other offices, was his brother's self-constituted groom-in-chief, Gabriel had already noted, without surprise. He had stopped being surprised about the Suir boys.

He came back after an interval of Adelaide, and listened anew. Horse-fairs, in some part of the world. Bargains, on Sam's part, bargains, on Iveagh's. Or rather, on Wickford's, for he generally seemed, in these

recitals, to be spending his brother's money. A shockingly dull pair of young men. Vulgar, almost, some of their observations, considering where they were exchanged. Did they take Mrs. Redgate's drawing-room for a stable?

Presently, parrying Adelaide with some energy, in order to have a breathing-space, he listened again. Circuses!

'There's a circus comin' to Readin',' said Sam, a trifle more for the benefit of the world, than Iveagh's. Perhaps he faintly saw a need for condescending to his immediate society.

'Is that a thing to see?' asked Gabriel, with satiric intent.

'Oh well, you see decent ridin',—specially the girls.'

'Ah.' Gabriel tried not to begin to be interested. Mrs. Redgate's immediate environment at a circus, he told himself, was unthinkable. It was grotesque. But the worst of Suir society was that it never minded such clashes, the least. It constantly did the next thing, which was generally inappropriate. Gabriel began to get the feeling of Suir again, and his politer London moods dropped off him.

'Like our Concours Hippique, is it?' he said, still very cynical, across intervening parties, to Rick.

'Not at all,' said Rick, looking like a benevolent ogre. 'I doubt if society will disturb itself, on the occasion.' He added, still more benevolently,—'I shouldn't go.'

'Nobody's going,' said Adelaide, contemptuously. 'It's only Iveagh rotting, as usual.'

'You get out, it was me proposed it,' said Sam politely. 'And what's more, we never asked you, did we, Iveagh? Our *party's* made up.'

This was funny,—also stimulating, as it appeared.

‘It might be rather a game,’ said Miss Courtier, debating the attraction. ‘When is it,—first week in April? I say, look here. Suppose Wick motored us all over for the evening.’

‘He won’t,’ said Sam, having consulted Iveagh’s expression. ‘Wick won’t be let in again so soon,—I mean, we did it too thoroughly last time.’

There was a ripple of appreciation. Gabriel at once determined *not* to ask Iveagh, in private, how his brother had last been ‘let in’ by the club inmates. It could not, he was certain, be worth hearing. It had happened, of course, while he was in London, doing far better things.

‘Well, someone else can take us,’ said Adelaide. ‘M. du Frettay, now,—I’m sure he can drive. And he wants to see life, don’t you?’ She did not prod him, precisely, but she moved her elegantly shod foot as if she were about to do so. This, like her little coachman’s click, was comprised in Adelaide’s drawing-room deportment.

‘There are performin’ tigers,’ said Sam, gravely.

M. du Frettay laughed, throwing back his head. He had a pleasant fashion of laughter, for so cynical a young man. From the first, his present company had approved of it.

‘I shall be back in London by then,’ he explained.

‘Oh, rats!’ said Sam, helpfully.

‘Come down for it,’ helped Adelaide.

‘Bring Trenchard along to look after us,’ helped Iveagh.

‘Tigers!’ cried Adelaide. Shrieks of laughter. Gabriel laughed too, having quite laid aside his cynical armoury. It seemed useless to preserve it.

'I don't think even tigers at Reading will stir Sir George,' he said to Mrs Redgate, who, as usual, had done little but contribute an occasional smile to the subject, and cake, and cups of tea.

'The idea!' said Ernestine.

That was a fair specimen, all told, of conversation at Hatchways on club-days, and the proportions about right. Rick one remark, Iveagh one remark, or two at most: the incorrigible talkers, such as Gabriel, Adelaide, Sam, and (we may add) the Duchess, doing the rest. Wickford, if he were there, and not in London or toiling at his book, contributing sense occasionally. Marchant, if he were there, and not at Oxford, conversing in good language, once he was driven from his academic pickets. Miss Allgood, the infant schoolmistress, if she were there, making beautiful, complete remarks, each perfect of its kind, and pitying all the lazy young people. Iveagh's dogs, if they were there, wagging their bodies, messing the place with crumbs, and disturbing all effort at connected and profitable dialogue, unless the Duchess were there as well, when she turned them out.

And Ernestine? She existed among them, and passed their provisions, and removed the white dogs' hairs from the velvet cushions, and just said—'The idea!' when they dragged down a hero's name. She sat and looked on, her nice capable hands locked in her lap whenever they had an interval, not wearing a quiet uniform with several medals on the breast of it, but deserving it, surely. Life-saving medals?—possibly: since hers was the greater warfare. Very possibly indeed, with eyes like that. Such eyes had 'seen life,' to use Adelaide's ridiculous expression, though not in the form of sawdust and circus animals.

She was seeing into life, quite probably, now : aware of the grave background that lay behind her giddy company : truth behind all the young heads, and tragedy attending some.

Once, having held for some time a hand to Adelaide for her cup, and having acquired it at last, with M. du Frettay's assistance, she made a remark, quite 'on her own.'

'Rick says I've got to give up my blue dragons,' she said, referring, as it seemed, to the cup she held.

'Oh, Mrs. Redgate !' exclaimed a chorus.

'What for ?' said Iveagh.

They had all always had those teacups with the blue dragons when they came to call at Hatchways ; and since they all called constantly, they were as indignant as children at the idea of anything being changed in the ceremony they expected. Plate for plate, cake for cake, it must be the same. It was in the expectation of such protest that she had warned them, doubtless.

'They're so ugly——' began Rick.

'Oh, Mr. Redgate !' cried chorus.

'They were the worst of our wedding-presents,' explained Rick to du Frettay, across the intervening items, 'and consequently, no one ever breaks them. Nothing sticks by one like a bad wedding-present, unless a bad conscience. Strong measures, I tell her, is the only thing. She's got quite a decent pink set, and another white one, put away.'

'But they're jolly *nice*,' said Sam, looking at his dragons. 'Ain't they, what's-your-name ?' (This was one of Gabriel's titles, in the district.) 'Mrs. Redgate, look here : you go on strike.'

There was a laugh at this.

‘Perhaps he’ll forget about it, Ernestine,’ said Adelaide in a stage whisper. ‘They do, if you let ’em alone.’

Ernestine shook her head. ‘Tea-time,’ she explained,—and it was enough. All-sufficing tea-time, hour of mystery, when her husband and the blue dragons must meet !

‘Keep ’em for us,’ said Iveagh of the dragons.

‘Yes, keep ’em for us,’ agreed others : and added in mischief to it,—‘Send him a pink one in there.’

So the little point was dealt with, and dropped again. She belonged to them, on the whole, more than to her husband. Shared among the district,—public property. . . . And the man accepted it !

VIII

BESS

‘ A BLESSING,’ said Ernestine, consulting her tablets.
‘ Next week it will be Bess.’

Ernestine was very free of drags on her in the way of relations, which drags would have detracted from her popular worth. But she had a niece, Bess Ryeborn, who has already risen once on these pages, and who appeared, in just that way, at Hatchways occasionally. Bess was rather a grave girl, but it was not a daunting kind of gravity : it chiefly meant she had long periods of study when she got out of the habit of society ; and when she came to visit her uncle Rick, she had to pick it up again. She enjoyed small jokes, fun and fripperies, as those do who seldom get the chance ; and of course uncle Rick saw to it she had all the chances possible.

Bess was an Art-student, a student especially of animals, and she owned a consuming passion for cats. Cats, great and small, were her pensioners. Since she understood the ineffable feline, her studies of cat-life and character were very clever indeed : and Ernestine, who had first set her on the track of this pursuit, saw a good chance now of its becoming a profession. A professional Bess was Ernestine’s desire, for the simple reason that the girl had not much to live on. Mrs. Redgate’s widower brother was a poor schoolmaster,

and could do little or nothing towards Bess's future. Even the art-training had been largely owing to Rick's generosity, supplementing the meagre allowance Bess had from home.

Both the Suir boys had met Miss Ryeborn, and liked her in the easy modern give-and-take fashion of young men. This was all very well : but—it was a great *but* to the Duchess—it happened that Bess was very pretty, with the same pleasant shape and size and square shoulders of her aunt Ernestine, dark-haired and with dark-blue eyes.

Now this, from the Duchess's point of view, was wrong of Ernestine. It was all very well to have a niece who was a needy art-student : but you ought not to have a needy niece eternally staying with you who looked like that. The Duchess, as was inevitable, at once accounted Miss Ryeborn a danger for the Duke. That is, not as a danger, since Wickford was going ultimately to marry dear Adelaide Courtier : but as a distraction introduced, on the part of Ernestine, at an interesting moment of Wickford's mating, which fell short of her usual high level of tact.

However, Ernestine did not stop having Bess to stay with her, because of Gertrude's obvious reflections upon the proceeding. Since Bess was a blessing, she had her rather frequently : and with Bess came cats and kittens, either in covered baskets among her hand-luggage, or collected for her delectation by the Suir boys, from various corners of the Wickford estate. The cats and kittens were not always so much of a blessing as Bess : but for the purposes of her study and eventual profit they were tolerated gladly. Sometimes the Suir boys, who took on animals, in daily life, as readily as persons, helped Bess by posing them.

Wickford and Iveagh's terms with this pretty girl afforded the ever-curious invader a new opportunity for study,—his ideas concerning them being by this time in a state of fusion, as we have said. The Suir boys were nothing if not unexpected, and Gabriel had wisely dropped all attempt to summarise them, by any classical standard. They had no manners, for instance, properly so called: yet whatever the unusual situations, of cats or persons, they discovered on Mrs. Redgate's premises when, together or separately, they chose to call, they always worked in. They made part of any such given situation immediately. They plunged, committed themselves, sacrificed their identity,—their dignity being Wickford,—they did not, with the beautiful British blandness, hang outside.

It was this peculiarity which made them constantly, and in spite of everything, essentials to their lady mother in her social schemes at Holmer: and that though she chose to carp and call their uses in question all the time. At a real domestic crisis, the Duchess needed her stupid boys, and betrayed the need: such crises—owing to Oxborough methods of hospitality—being not unknown in her vicinity. Gabriel had seen both brothers, and the younger especially, cut on sight, as it were, by the most casual and homely means, the knot of the worst dilemmas into which their mother's ill-mixed and ill-managed house-parties had got themselves tied. They both owned, had she ever been willing to admit it, the trick which in the world's business is really the best trick of all,—that of living: or to put it more accurately, living among their kind. They had it by right of birth, Wick partially, and Iveagh in perfection; and in spite of their slang and savagery, and talk of equine diseases in drawing-rooms,

Gabriel began to grant it a point, a real scoring-point,—in the younger above all.

That he was suffering from what is called the Irish charm, in thus thinking so constantly about Iveagh, Gabriel had no idea. For the best of reasons,—Iveagh was not charming. It was impossible to connect the word with him, at least to Latin minds. He did not even try to be. He was plain, ugly if you chose to think so. He was slight and unimportant. He looked alongside people, said what occurred to him, smiled seldom, laughed never, and went about his own concerns.

How much of this so-called attraction is mystery simply, the animal-like evasive quality of a very old race, hunting,—and hunted of course,—forced to disguise itself, if not to obliterate, is a question for the wise. Gabriel had heard, or read, of the Irish charm, of course, as he had read of the Scotch crabbedness: but he had not expected that. You never do expect them, it is their secret. Besides,—in order finally to bother the well-read foreigner,—the Suirs were the ‘other Irish,’ not quite the sort Gabriel had learnt by heart in literature on the Irish theme. This is a trick of the racial type that needs but mention to be admitted. Are we not most of us the ‘other English,’ when foreigners really come to look into us? Have we not all of us met (thank Heaven) the ‘other Scotch’?

It was this vague resemblance in Iveagh to an animal, Mrs. Redgate suspected, that attracted Bess. Bess’s eyes upon him, at times, had the lingering, loving look they had when attached to a cat. She certainly liked him,—her face changed a little when he came in. When Wickford came in without him, Bess’s eyes expressed it at once. The world, though always pleasant to Bess,

pleasant and serious, was unaffected by Wickford. A Duke or two about the place made no difference. Iveagh swayed things a very little . . . still, they swayed. And Bess was accustomed in life to have them steady.

So Bess's aunt, in the quiet depths of her, grew anxious. Was handling, or no handling, necessary to a situation like this? The future was not plain. The Duchess, thinking about the Duke, was an obstacle to quiet communing. Iveagh, walking alone and thinking about Lise, was another. Iveagh's habit of sharing with all men, outwardly, his comradeship with Bess over the cat-baskets, was not a thing that could be checked. Wickford's habit of looking at pretty blue-eyed girls of no account was (unluckily for poor Gertrude) not a thing that could be checked either. The Suir boys were both there, mixed in with Hatchways and its fate for better or worse. It was of course Ernestine's own fault to have mixed them.

So things stood when Bess, blessing as she was, jumped out at Holmer station on to the ash-strewn platform, a basket on her arm. She was a blessing in spite of all. Rick's face, beaming ogre-like when he took her in his arms at the station-gate, proved that. Ernestine's face under the larches proved it too, not quite so expansively.

'Take care of it,' pleaded Bess, as her uncle relieved her of the basket, 'it' being something within, nobody could of course imagine what. Cracking sounds, as though 'it' were sharpening small claws, came from the basket's depths at intervals: and at intervals also, small protesting cries. Not wild lamenting cries of a caged and outraged kitten, but little cries of ennui, directed to a feeling friend. Interludes interspersed

them of audible and equally unreasoning purr,—sounds which would have demonstrated, to such as Bess, that kitten's age to a nicety. It had recently learnt to purr : thus, even in annoying confinement, and the surging of station circumstances, it was worth while practising the accomplishment, for 'its' private consolation and support.

'How's everybody?' said Bess, as she walked beneath the larch-trees, her arm in Mrs. Redgate's. 'Oh, there's a new bed,—what's to be in it,—tulips? Oh, why not *tulips*, Uncle Rick?'

'Because,' said Ernestine sedately, 'hyacinths are coming up.'

'*Coming*, are they?' Bess dropped on her knees on the grass. 'Is it the spring? I might have known it would be at Hatchways. It's hopelessly winter in town. . . . Please, that basket. May it come out, Ernestine? It's asking. Pickle, come along.'

'It' walked out on the grass, yawning : as though—bless you!—it had not been so eager to come as all that. Thus do its kind disconcert expectation, only, unlike Iveagh, deliberately. They baffle and disappoint of fixed intent. That kitten was delighted, really, to be in the country, fingering the sweet springing grass. It thought about squirrels instantly,—squirrels and mice. Out-of-door mice, more delicate than the urban variety. Possible brown bees in conjectural crocuses. But it yawned, looked absent and offended slightly,—and the instant after sat down and passionately licked a protruded leg.

Bess called her aunt 'Ernestine' like all the world, for her aunt was only a baker's dozen of years older than she was, which, Bess considered, did not count. Moreover, 'aunt' as well as 'Ernestine' was superero-

gatory. 'Aunt Nesta,' a just possible combination, appeared in public, before the Duchess for example. Bess was equally frightened of the Duchess, and bored by her. It is possible her Grace, when she met Bess at Hatchways, and about the village, had made her opinion of her presence there too clear. It was so impossible for the Duchess to disguise her true thoughts,—it was almost wrong. She rarely did so, and never with young girls.

'How's everybody?' said Bess again: meaning, of course, 'How's Iveagh?' She did not know she meant it, probably; but Ernestine suspected, as never before, what that slight colour in her serious young face implied. That little pink spot of excitement was not only the joy of getting to the country from London: no, nor the rapture of being, as she always was at her Uncle Rick's, an honoured and important guest. It was other things,—one other thing,—*the* other thing, to a healthy girl. And she was too naturally clear and simple to conceal it completely.

Later on, of course, she saw him; but she talked to Wickford, who made himself unusually agreeable in respect of Bess. Quite uncommonly. Really, had Wickford's lady mother been there, which she was happily not, she would have been terrified. The Duchess would have been the more terrified that Bess with her little colour was unusually pretty that night, deliciously dressed with her inevitable simple taste, and just perceptibly shy in her son's company. Her maternal terror would have been completed, concentrated, consummated, by Adelaide's sudden and violent dislike for Bess.

'Good heavens,' thought Mrs. Redgate, in the wise and secret depths of her. '*What* is coming upon me?'

She really did not know. She could not imagine, granted Wickford. He was always a little hard to understand, and incapable when it came to explaining himself, especially in a delicate matter. Faced with a delicate matter, Wickford tumbled over his own feelings, as an incapable rider at a fence might tumble over his horse's head. Still, his nature was sensible, and he generally knew, when it came to action, where he was going. His proceedings, if nothing else, made it clear.

Well, this evening,—the boys and Adelaide came in after dinner,—he made straight for Bess. Always sociable, Wickford was pleasant. More, he monopolised her, at others' expense. M. du Frettay called him 'accapareur,' and did not trouble to translate the expression. He tried to get a winged word in edgeways, tried hard,—but the Duke, presuming on his old acquaintance with the girl, pushed steadily ahead, and ousted him—clean!

Iveagh, on the other hand, was worse than usual,—dull really to a marvel. He was silent, as he had been at the long-past crisis of his fate with Lise. He looked at once heated and pale in his manner, sick and surly, and even Mrs. Redgate could draw little response from him. Since boyhood he had been subject to violent headaches at times: and she could only suppose that, or a domestic fracas with his mother. Of his brother, being so used to Wickford's easy kindness, and being absorbed by his present manner to Bess, she did not think.

Yet, to her surprise and pain, she found it was so. Later on, she had the history from Wickford himself. As not infrequently in that country place on a warm evening, they all walked back together, Rick and Gabriel escorting Adelaide in the vanguard,—Ernestine and Bess the boys.

‘Do you mind not walking so fast, Wick?’ suggested Ernestine in the lane. ‘I’m not quite so young as Bess.’

‘I’d sooner keep in hearing,’ said the young man savagely: really, his tone was nearly that. The roughness both brothers could show at moments was at the worst. It was lucky, indeed, du Fretay was not there, for it is more than probable he would have cuffed him.

Ernestine was silent a second in sheer wonder. ‘Wick, my dear boy,—’ she said. She could of course only conceive of one explanation, jealousy. What else could it possibly be? After an evening of keeping Bess entirely to his little ducal self, Wickford was jealous of Iveagh having her for five minutes. It was really not more than that to the Holmer lodge.

‘Oh,—Lord,’ muttered Wickford, just audible. Then he turned to her. ‘You’d better hear. We had a row after dinner. I shall have to write to Trenchard, that’s all. He’d better go and be d—done with.’ He just caught back a stronger expression. ‘Sorry, Mrs. Redgate. I can’t manage him alone, that’s all. In that state he does for me. Trenchard’ll take him by the scruff, put the fear of——’ Once more he swallowed the full phrase, just in time. Wickford, decidedly, had been moved, for him.

After a minute more of marvelling, a clear thought came to replace the unjust one in Ernestine’s mind. Jealousy, indeed!—when he was protecting Bess! Her Bess.

‘Drinking again?’ she said gently.

‘Mean you didn’t see it? Well, that’s something to be thankful for. I told him he was not to come down to you. Course he did, wouldn’t have otherwise,—I was a fool. I said I’d lock the spirits,—hang it, I’m master there! He said I was welcome and so on,—do

as I liked on my premises,—he'd no idea of remaining under my charge.'

'Wick! You didn't quarrel?'

'No,' said the Irishman grimly, 'we nearly fought. I said a few pretty healthy things,—can't help it for my life when he sneers,—a kid like that. You saw how his eyes looked. . . . He's not been like that to me since—since—— Look here,' he broke off. 'I'd better go after them. Once through the gate, it's as black as pitch in the avenue. Will you let me, Mrs. Redgate? Never mind what I say.' This last was a belated apology, on the Duke of Wickford's part.

'Wait.' He was going, actually, to leave her in the lurch, but she stopped him. 'Listen, Wick,—you're excited. Let me say one thing,—Bess will be better than you. Better for Iveagh. I don't think,' said Ernestine, 'that anyone cares for Bess more than I do,—but I'm not afraid.'

'I am,' said Wickford wretchedly. 'You don't know him.'

'You mean he would say anything to hurt her,—a girl?'

'Oh, Lord knows. He's not himself. He's been up and down lately: but to-night it's down,—very low.'

'It's not low down,' said Ernestine. She was not the least aware of making a joke. 'I mean,' she resumed after a pause, as Wickford seemed to be calming, 'he would not make Bess suffer because of his suffering,—my Bess.'

'No,' muttered Wickford. *Her* Bess, that was the point. His brother he knew, at the worst, would have regard to anything that was hers. All the time, Mrs. Redgate was repeating internally, '*Is it so? Are you in love with her?* But how sudden, how strangely

sudden, Wickford, if it is.' Nor, till afterwards, did she think about the Duchess at all, so greatly was she stirred and perplexed.

They came up with Bess and Iveagh standing under the last of the thick trees' shadow, just before the open drive swept round to the Duchess's door. The Duke's drive and door they were, of course, only the Duchess's hand, in Ernestine's memories, was so clearly upon them. Iveagh and Bess were not speaking. He stood very still in the shadow, quiet as death.

'Won't you come in, Mrs. Redgate?' said Wickford, in something like his ordinary tone. 'Mother is there,—she'd like it.'

'I think not, thanks,' said Ernestine. 'I told Rick we would not keep him waiting. They'll be back at the gate by now.'

She gave her hand to Iveagh in the darkness,—he touched it merely, did not take. Taking that hand would have committed him to a fresh effort, it would have meant struggling further, a promise, well he knew! He had promised enough, he thought that night, to women: spent himself enough for them. He had struggled sufficiently far. He intended to rest now a bit, if he could get to London, or Oxford, anywhere safe away. East Africa better than nowhere, since Wick willed it now along with the others,—get a good start, and then drop behind Sir George. . . .

'Good night, Miss Ryeborn,' said Wickford. 'Sorry you wouldn't come in. Come along—' The last to his brother, much as if he had been a dog.

'Good night, Iveagh,' said Bess. 'I'm so sorry about poor Timmins.'

Timmins! Paralysis, on the part of the auditors,—Iveagh's relative, and Bess's. Paralysis, only to be

remedied by a violent move by Wickford, fetching, as it were, his enigmatic brother out of the toils.

Timmins ! Timmins was the stable cat, a plain tom tabby, that patrolled the yard at Holmer, carefully named by Bess and Iveagh according to his dapper looks and excellent mousing disposition : fetched to Hatchways for want of better one rainy morning, long since, and drawn in a plain-cat attitude, a smug attitude, as a ' study of markings ' merely. Timmins, the conscientious model, since dead of rat-poison, or poisoned rat,—which, Iveagh was uncertain,—produced and pitied at such a moment,—well !

' Did Iveagh talk to you ? ' said Ernestine, when they had got just far enough along the avenue, safe from the retreating brothers, behind whom the door of the mansion slammed, safe from Rick and the clever Frenchman, back from escorting Adelaide, leaning on the Holmer gate. ' Did you talk ? '

' He didn't, much,' said Bess, rather wistfully. ' He asked after the Pickle, though,—remembered. And he told me about Timmins, when I asked.'

' I see,' said Ernestine. ' Asking about the Pickle was wise, of Iveagh.' A pause, reproachful probably. ' And asking about Timmins on your part was, I suppose, polite.'

' Don't be silly, Ernestine,' said Bess. ' As if Timmins and the Pickle were equals, socially. . . . I was rather glad he asked, though,' she said, after hesitation, and speaking lower, for they were near enough now to the lodge-gate to catch the scent of du Frettay's cigarette. ' Because to-night, you know, up at Hatchways, he seemed so very cross.'

Cross ! And in that little, shaken tone. . . .

' Wickford has better manners,' said Ernestine,

guilty of experiment. But really, she did so want to know,—for Gertrude's sake.

'Oh yes, he's nice—' In a most unsatisfied voice. 'I always liked Wickford,' admitted Bess. After another pause, a fresh effort at justice. 'They're both very good.'

'Too good, do you think?' said Ernestine, in the frightful pause that ensued. It was so very hard on Wickford,—after his efforts, too!

'No,' said Bess, reflecting. 'No. I don't mind a man simply for being good, it isn't fair. And besides'—growing warmer—'think of Mr. Elphinstone! Mr. Elphinstone—goodness!—he was like a man in a book. He always made me think of Philip in *that* book,—*you* know,—standing and showing Wickford how to do it, and what he ought to be like. I don't wonder Guy killed Philip——'

'It was the other way,' said Ernestine.

'Was it? Well, he did as bad,—worse really for Philip. Still,' said Bess, 'I don't wonder Guy took his revenge like that——'

'But Bess, dear! He did not take his revenge. He saved Philip's life at the expense of his own. Really,' said Ernestine, piqued for the classics. 'Rick!'

'What's this,' said Rick, in an avuncular tone, for the parties were now united.

'Only she's libelling the Heir of Redcliffe. She says he murdered Philip.'

'It was the other way, so far as I remember,' said Rick.

'Coals of fire,' said Bess indignantly. 'Such a cowardly revenge. And Philip quite unable to do anything,—too ill. No, Ernestine,—listen! Wickford would never do a thing like that, it's hopeless to imagine

it. He'd feel how stale it was before he started,—started for Italy or wherever it was. Yes, that's it,' said Bess, pleased to have a definition. 'Wickford would never do anything really stale. You could trust him not to, when it came to the point.'

'I see,' said Ernestine, giving up the Heir of Redcliffe. 'And Iveagh?'

'Oh, he couldn't,' said Bess, hastily. 'He couldn't—I don't know—he couldn't be in that kind of book. Iveagh's another author,—isn't he, Uncle Rick?'

'Another shelf,' said Rick. 'Bound differently,—quite right, Bessie. Wickford's a book I don't much want to open, between ourselves.'

'Oh, Uncle Rick, how nasty!' Bess put a reproachful, niece-like arm through his. The gesture was one of complete agreement, though the words were not. 'I'm afraid, you know,' said Bess, suddenly virtuous, 'we've been talking personalities.'

'The only subject to talk, Mademoiselle,' said Gabriel, speaking for the first time. He was subject to dreams to-night, as any man would be in this exquisite half-darkness, moonsheen through the larch-boughs, promise of hidden spring.

'Not for this girl,' said Rick. 'She's indifferent to persons, altogether,—human persons,—for at least six hours of every day.'

'Blessing,' said Bess, thoughtfully. Her maiden thoughts had left Mark Elphinstone, and Wickford, and even Iveagh. They spurned Philip Morville and the good Sir Guy. They skipped M. du Fretay, charming as he was,—they avoided Uncle Rick and his teasing, and moved forward to a basket. Bess's heart was straying, mislaying, evidently: yet it was not lost beyond recall,—since the Pickle held part of it.

IX

MRS. REDGATE TAKES A HIGH LINE

WELL, here was not material to give Mrs. Redgate, Bess's aunt and the Duchess's friend, a quiet night. Yet—we regret thus to give our heroine away—she had one : because she was one of the healthy normal people to whom the wakeful romantic form of night was nearly unknown. That her thinking, when she did it, was not real, hard thinking, we deny utterly. Let him who denies it try to take Mrs. Redgate's place, for just one Saturday at this period, when both Holmer and Hatchways were full of guests.

We say Saturday, because the guests were largely week-enders, Bess and M. du Frettay being the only resident visitors at Hatchways, and four or five Ox-boroughs, horribly noisy, the permanent residuum at Holmer House. But week-enders, all the rest of the time, must be reckoned for. Things must be thought of for them, engagements made, tastes consulted, the frightful question of household linen,—the dark problem of the country butcher,—the people whom they may meet, or must not meet, earnestly reviewed : the tired ones (and so many of these come from London) successfully concealed in quiet rooms and shady hammocks : those that hate cats and can barely tolerate kittens considered,—alas, for Bess !

It was over these debates, forethoughts and provi-

dences that Bess proved a blessing, invariably. She wanted of course to paint, being in the country : but she left her painting at any point when she saw Ernestine in perplexity. How many art students will do that ? They regard their art so much more than their aunt, do those student-maidens, commonly. And imagine a kitten-painter who has just, after an hour's patient coaxing, got the model to pose !—no, Bess was a blessing, quite exceptionally. She went to the village, at a moment's notice, to blarney the butcher,—who then and there preferred her to the Duchess, and allowed her the best joint. She did the flowers, all of them : Ernestine, at her advent, laid the whole floral scheme, for weeks, in Bess's arms. She never messed things, or dropped things, having the quick firm fingers of art. She wrote a lovely picture-hand on the menu cards, which was also readable. She washed the very best-of-all white china, when Ernestine was not quite sure of the new maid. She ironed too,—really we tremble to breathe in the ear of female, and waste on the ear of male readers, what kind of ironing, in the real rigour of week-enders, Miss Ryeborn did. Hatchways was not a large house, and its hospitable doors often stretched,—stretched to straining. . . . M. du Frettay, profoundly interested in the ironing mysteries, mentioned, when he took occasion to spy into the little wash-house beyond the scullery, that his mother did the same. That he spied as often as he could, goes without saying : for Bess in an apron at an ironing-board, with her beautiful arms bare to the elbow, was delicious to behold.

Enfin,—as M. du Frettay said,—pitch your standard at a certain height, in hospitality, and no thinking is like it : it is hard, hard work. Only whatever you do,

do not pitch it too high, or your guests themselves become conscious of the soaring standard,—straining to breaking-point, threatening, reproaching them,—which never should be.

Ernestine's guests were not worried by her thoughts for their good, they were all so silent. She and Bess seemed always to be easy, and to have plenty of time. Nobody in consequence ever insulted her with—'You must be tired, dear, do come and *rest* a little,'—which being interpreted means—'You are getting old, and plainer than I remembered, do for goodness' sake keep still.'

Nobody ever said either—'Ernestine, what a sweet room this is,—what good soup,—how nicely you *do* things': they forgot about their surroundings, and very often, about their food. They forgot most things, at Hatchways, beyond that they were thankful to get there, and powerfully sorry to leave. And the weary,—the really tired ones,—we will not speak of them. We have seen how, to Sir George and such workers, the very thought of Hatchways was peace. And it was they, needless to say, wanderers and ponderers in the world's cause,—the worn official, the shrinking success, the conscious failure,—that Ernestine was really happy to have.

Only not cranks, she avoided them: or they avoided her, we cannot be certain which. Ernestine, and her husband as well, had a taste for sanity.

The Holmer house-party did not invade the Hatchways house-party often: though the invasion was certainly that way round when it came. Holmer hospitality, compact of 'English pretension and Irish untidiness,'—that most uncharitable saying of Mar-

chant's—came to look, at times : to look at, discontentedly, and see how Ernestine did it. The Oxborough party assaulted her precincts in the morning, by preference, when least required, both sexes tightly bound in tweed and shod in calf, both, as a rule, dropping their cigarette-ends into the crocus-bed before they entered,—but they came, almost invariably, to see where Wickford or Iveagh was. Having attained some news of those truant members of the Holmer household, that pair of traitors to the Oxborough tradition, they generally remarked on something they saw with unvarnished sincerity, untainted by any courteous intention, looked carefully at the ' painting-girl ' or blankly at the Frenchman, and went away again.

Rarely, however, they pounced upon and carried off the defaulting cousin, nephew, or grandson, Iveagh or Wick. Iveagh always, and the Duke as often as possible, melted into the atmosphere when Oxboroughs were about. They disappeared with the greatest precision and unanimity when especially two Oxboroughs graced their mother's board,—two uncles, Giles and Oliver, loathed by both. Iveagh, the more pure-blooded cave-dweller, was then never to be found, no corner of the estate, treacherous breeze or untrustworthy leaf, disclosed him. Wickford, intermingled with a Saxon stock, was forced at moments to materialise ; but he was at his stiffest and least expressive when he did so ; and he had, of course, at his uncles' hands, to suffer for two.

Things generally went from bad to worse on these occasions, until, boisterously urged by all the family, the Duchess was driven to intervene.

Thus, one fine morning, came the Duchess in person,

stepping under the larch-trees, and down the Hatchways drive. She looked about her as she came, keen-eyed, seeking her defaulters; and caught a glimpse, through branches, of a hammock and a tired guest. The branches were not leafy enough yet to do their duty, and Ernestine had apologised for them; however, even the Duchess dared not push her exploration further in that direction, so she pursued her way.

Then she perceived Miss Elizabeth Ryeborn, known to Oxboroughs as the painting-girl, peacefully installed with two cats and a sketch-book, on a rug on the grass beneath the study window, where there is no creeper, and one can have one's back to the wall.

'Then he's not there,' thought the Duchess, her maternal thoughts, as usual, caressing her eldest-born. 'Let's hope, granted he's not there, he's where he ought to be.'

She pursued, stepping lightly and firmly, for she was a well-set-up little woman, round the corner where the pink tree or *Pyrus* is to the Hatchways hall door. There was Rick, master of the estate, not to say the pink tree or *Pyrus*,—which was more advanced than the Duchess's,—sunning himself with the *Times* newspaper. Whether his spectacles were turned on one of his own articles we leave open to conjecture,—he seemed content.

'Hullo,' said Rick. 'Good morning. Come after Nesta? She's somewhere about.'

The Duchess lowered her sunshade with a click. She was no stickler for decorum, at least from people whom she regarded as her equals.

'I've come, Mr. Redgate,' she said monumentally, 'to find my sons.'

'Really now, I haven't seen 'em,' said Rick,

giving his learned mind to it. 'There's du Frettay, now, he might know about 'em,—he's working in there.'

'Thanks,' said the Duchess, who had seen M. du Frettay's dark head in the study, to the rear of Miss Ryeborn and the cats. Working, she privately thought, was one way of putting it, considering a girl under the window. Ernestine ought to look after that child better, with Frenchmen about.

'No,' said the Duchess aloud. 'I can do without M. du Frettay, since he is well occupied—evidently——'

'A votre service,' called M. du Frettay, from behind the half-open study door. That was Hatchways all over,—doors and windows standing open, all the morning air invading all the domestic interior,—there was no proper privacy when one appeared at the unconventional hour.

'Stay where you are,' called the Duchess, 'unless you know exactly where Wickford is, then you can come out.'

Silence, profound. M. du Frettay, taking her at her word, had recurred to his so-called labours. He repaid incivility with incivility,—it is such nonsense about his countrymen's manners! The Duchess registered this as a specimen of French form, to be discussed amid Oxboroughs that evening.

'Ask Bess where Nesta is,' called Rick. Was there ever such an easy-going establishment?

'Willingly,' called M. du Frettay, reviving. 'Did I know where is your niece.'

'You hypocrite!' thought the Duchess.

'Ernestine is down at the chickens,' said a sweet dreamy tone in the void: the voice of a young lady, lost in art and circled by kittens, who was very happy indeed. 'I mean the incubators. Shall I come, Uncle Rick?'

'No,' said Rick. 'You stop where you are.' And, folding up the *Times* newspaper, he escorted the Duchess himself.

'You incubate, do you?' she said, on the way.

'She's taken to it,' said Rick. 'Only on trial, though. If it doesn't work out, in money and trouble, I advised her to give it up.'

'I should say,' said the Duchess, 'she'd do that without you, Mr. Redgate.'

She put down certain sides of her friend Ernestine, we may mention, as 'commercial.' She thought, good style as dear Ernestine was, it would not take very deep seeking to discover commercial origins or roots to the Ryeborn family. It came from the north,—the north midland,—and she suspected Manchester. Both aunt and niece used quaint northern phrases at times. When the Duchess was really displeased with Ernestine, she added to her image a Manchester background. Being very deeply displeased this morning, on Wickford's account, she did so now.

'Well,' said Ernestine's husband, 'she's not without a sense of finance, I'll grant you. Du Frettay there is surprised I don't let her do more,—give her scope, as he calls it. We were talking about it lately.'

'Don't you give in to *his* ideas,' said the Duchess: who was all for the rights of woman, unless they happened to be upheld by France. Then she upheld the rights of English custom, as opposed to French custom,—the man with a close hand on the money-bags. As for her own case—well, it was exceptional. She was a widow, and a mother: Wickford, man as he undoubtedly was, could not be allowed to know which things were which, just at present.

'I shouldn't think of giving in,' explained Rick.

'His ideas are rubbish, half of 'em. But he's amusing to listen to. Really, I like that young man.'

The Duchess sniffed, faintly. She granted him leave to like Gabriel du Frettay, within bounds, the young fellow accruing to her personal estate, via George. She undertook herself, in her single person, to keep du Frettay in his place, if he became nationally obstreperous.

They found Ernestine at the chickens, quiet tragedy upon her countenance. She extended her left hand, mutely, to her husband as he came up the path.

'Hullo!' said Rick, looking. 'That's bad. Not a fox, is it?' For she held a small, dead yellow chicken in one hand.

'That's not a fox,' said the Duchess with an experienced eye. 'That's a cat, probably.'

'A cat?' Rick's face grew long as well. 'All right. Poor girl, we won't tell her. It got out, I suppose?'

'I put them in the coop, for an hour, to run,' said Ernestine regretfully. 'I thought the sun wouldn't hurt them. I suppose there was a hole.'

'Requiescat,' said Rick, half sympathising, half chaffing her. Indeed, there was no marked commerciality, that moment, about his wife. 'I'll bury it. Bess never counted 'em, did she? Very well, then, we won't let on.'

Thus Rick, the good uncle, and away he went, with the chicken, to find a spade. Ernestine, having reimprisoned the rest of the brood, left the atmosphere of incubators, which was stuffy, rather, for Gertrude, and went with her instead to a seat: a seat in a place which was not precisely a view-point, but urged one to get up, after resting a little, and find a view. Many of the Hatchways seats were unfixed like this, 'way-

side stopping-places ' (like Happiness) tempting one on. And yet you could be happy upon any of them.

' Now, Ernestine,' said the Duchess monumentally, sitting in the extreme corner of the seat, and disdaining cushions extended. ' Will you tell me exactly where my boy is, with that girl of yours. It's time I knew about it.'

Mrs. Redgate, of course, had expected this, sooner or later. Considering the week that lay behind her, since Bess's arrival, and considering Gertrude's strict watchfulness on all girls in her precious son's vicinity at all times, it was bound to come. Yet notwithstanding her expectation, her preparation, and her clear conscience, she was startled by Gertrude's tone. To disturb her, in the morning, with a tone like that, was trying of Gertrude,—it really was. She would sooner, in the name of friendliness, have been warned.

' I really cannot tell you,' she said gently, though in the manner of parrying. ' Had you not better ask himself ? '

' Apart from the fact,' said the Duchess, ' that Wickford makes himself, since my brother Giles' arrival on Friday night, as hard as possible to find, owing to his own brother's example——'

' Unjust,' said the little indicator in Ernestine ; her eyes merely wandered, seeking the elusive view.

' — Quite apart from that,' said the Duchess, ' it is highly improbable things are at a stage when anything could be drawn from Wickford. I hope naturally they will never reach a stage when I need to enquire,—still less when he comes to tell me of his own accord. It is, however, time for me to face the fact that he is flirting, if flirting he is : and I expect—I ask you as a friend to tell me.'

Ernestine, having lifted her buckler a little higher during the course of that speech, laid it down beside her at the end. It was inevitable to think of her in military panoply, armed, as she sat at the other end of the Duchess's seat.

'Gertrude,' she said, 'you will excuse me, but there is only one thing I can possibly say to reassure you. I really don't think Bess cares for Wickford.'

'Oh.' Pause. 'Well,' said the Duchess, 'that is something, though——'

'Excuse me, it is everything,' said Ernestine. Pause. 'If you tell me,' she resumed, 'that Bess would accept Wickford on any ground but that of really caring for him——'

Pause. 'Well,' said the Duchess, 'this is hardly on the point——'

'It is exactly on it,' said Ernestine. Were they going to quarrel, really? She felt some doubt, knowing her friend's weaknesses and peculiarities. But these things had to be said. It was better to get them said, and come on to the kinder part, if it could be managed, afterwards.

Now, the Duchess considered herself debarred by friendship, which she took quite seriously, from stating her real conviction, which was that a nondescript little girl like Bess, of probably commercial, and possibly Manchester, antecedents, is bound to throw everything to the winds for the chance of a Duchess's coronet. Instead, she gave Ernestine's good sense the credit of knowing this, while she took a high line in the matter for the sake of her dignity. The Duchess hardly thought the worse of her for it, either; though she could not believe Ernestine had not been exulting in spirit during the critical week past.

'May I ask,' she said, after an interval, 'what evidence you have of Miss Ryeborn's indifference?'

'Oh dear no, Gertrude, you mayn't indeed. Why,' said Ernestine, 'I might as well ask you what evidence you hold of your son's serious—or of his honest intentions.'

'Ernestine!'

'Exactly,' said Ernestine, and laughed, glancing eye to eye. 'You wouldn't like it.'

The Duchess strove hard for anything like her ordinary point of view. Things, for the moment, seemed to be crumbling. 'You're Manchester,' she said to herself. 'You mayn't be more. I am extremely modern and amiable not to snub you.' Thus she clutched things, and pulled them straight again.

'Take it,' she said dryly, 'that I have been rather full up with my people for a week past,—too much so to see as much as I might have seen, had I been at liberty.'

Ernestine assented. 'Take it that I have too. Still, since I know them both, I really see no harm in it——'

'No harm?'

'No harm, surely, in their understanding one another, granted of course they know their own minds. M. du Frettay,' said Ernestine, 'would be rather shocked at me——'

'M. du Frettay?'

'Yes. You know the French think that you and I, because we're married, ought to know better about such things than Wickford or Bess. I don't think so,—I told him I didn't——'

'You spoke to him about the matter?'

'No, we were talking generally. However'—she recurred—'I really think Bess knows her own mind, Gertrude. I really think you need have no fear.'

During the interval that ensued, the Duchess's faded little Oxborough face was set. So far, the morning's business had not turned out at all as she had arranged it. She had come, speaking broadly, of course, to scold Ernestine. Ernestine had hindered that, by her high line, almost from the first. Now she, the Duchess of Wickford, was to be reassured, it seemed, but not at all in the way she wished. That Wickford should, in any circumstances, let himself in for a refusal . . . and yet she knew too well she could count on neither of those wretched boys for proper pride. Fear, even imminent fear, of a refusal would not stay Wickford, should he so choose, from laying himself at Miss Rye-born's feet. A far more humiliating certainty had not stayed Iveagh. . . . The Duchess's warrior nostrils dilated, and her brow knit. She would greatly have liked, at that minute, to slap them both. . . .

'Well,' she said, moving. 'I suppose that is all you think you can tell me. I had an idea I knew you better than that.'

'I'm sorry, Gertrude, really. I have been a little—puzzled myself.'

'Indeed? On what grounds?'

'I thought it odd of Wickford,—unlike him. They have never been anything but friends before.'

'Oh. Well, Wickford's not particularly given to warning one of his intentions, if that's all. At least they are not together at this moment?'

'No,' said Ernestine. 'When Bess is drawing, she prefers to be alone.'

'Oh, that's why, is it?' thought the Duchess. 'By the way,' she said, 'I meant to tell you. I shouldn't trust that young fellow Frettay too far.'

Mrs. Redgate coloured, and almost started. At

least she turned her head. 'With Bess, do you mean?'

'Whom else should I mean?' The Duchess glanced coolly at her. It was fair return for the stroke at Wickford, anyhow.

'Well?' she said, after a long interlude.

'I suppose it's extraordinarily hard for me to distrust anybody,' said Ernestine, slowly. 'Certainly I could not M. du Fretay. I was just wondering if I could.'

'He's a Parisian,' said the Duchess, digging the point of her sunshade in the soft grass. 'Parisians are all the same.'

'They may be. But really,—he works so hard.'

'Works?'

'Yes. I never knew anyone so hard-working. He simply slaves at those plans of his all the morning,—even these lovely mornings,—as you probably saw. And goodness knows at what time of day he starts. I asked him to let me know,' said Ernestine, 'because of breakfast. I promised him food at any hour after six he liked.'

'Six?' said the Duchess: who had not herself troubled to feed M. du Fretay before half-past nine, when under her charge.

'Yes, but he only laughed. He seems to think a man can work for three hours on nothing at all. It's not good for him,' said Ernestine, 'and when he's supposed to be resting, too. Really, we shall have to teach him better ways.'

'You are talking a good deal this morning,' thought the Duchess; *à propos* of nothing, of course, unless the little flush in Ernestine's face, which was still there. She was a person who changed colour rarely. 'You are quite a pretty woman still,' she added to the thought, as her friend got up of a sudden and walked

away from the seat, as though to discover that elusive view.

‘ Well, so I suppose you got him to accept breakfast,’ she said, still digging little holes in the turf, when Ernestine came back.

‘ At seven,—we compromised,’ said Ernestine,—who had found the view in the interval, and looked more contented. She had had to overcome a rage of anger with Gertrude: not at all uncommon, we may mention, in that society. The flush had been anger, purely; for, like all strong natures, she had a store of deep anger within. . . . Doubly suspected,—twice insulted in one conversation. Really, it was only Gertrude who could do such things, and still expect to be liked!

‘ What does du Frettay work at?’ said the Duchess, watching her. They were now face to face.

‘ Oh, plans of those machines. He has got hold of a new idea for one, since he has been across, and is trying it,—trying to work it out. Iveagh understands,—it’s too much for most of us. By the way, Gertrude,—’

‘ Well?’

‘ Perhaps I ought to tell you. They won’t like me for it. Have you any objection to Iveagh going up?’

‘ Up?’

‘ Flying, yes. Because, unless you stop him, he certainly will.’

Another pause, during which the Duchess recovered. We had perhaps better repeat, this was in the infant days of English aviation, accidents at every turn.

‘ If Iveagh asks my permission,’ she said coldly, ‘ I shall refuse it, naturally.’

‘ Not otherwise?’

‘ Otherwise, he will do what he likes.’

Mrs. Redgate walked away again,—then came back and stood beside her. ‘It’s dangerous,’ she mentioned. ‘Suppose he were killed.’

‘Suppose,’ said the Duchess, ‘your little Frenchman was.’

‘If my little Frenchman was’—her low tone concentrated—‘his mother would go down to the grave sorrowing within a week. I am sure of that, anyhow, from Sir George.’

‘Ah,’ said the Duchess, dropping her eyes. ‘No doubt.’

‘It was because of the danger, of course, Iveagh accepted,’ pursued Ernestine,—persisted, is a better word. It took courage, with that face before her.

‘I dare say. Iveagh will take any risks, won’t he?—except the ones we advise.’

‘Do you advise him risks? I shouldn’t, Gertrude. I mean, he’s far too fond of them. He’ll choose, of his own accord, the worst he can find.’

‘So his brother tells me.’

‘And why, does Wickford say? . . . Because he cannot believe,—nothing will persuade him,—that anybody really cares whether he lives or dies.’

‘Thank you, Ernestine. . . . I care, and he knows it. If he gives me a chance of stating my feelings, about that flying nonsense, I shall do so, gladly. Not otherwise.’

‘But you know he won’t,’ thought Ernestine. ‘You know he won’t, Gertrude! So you don’t care. You don’t care really. . . . Isn’t it getting a little cold?’ she said aloud. ‘There’s a fire in the breakfast-room,—do come in.’

Iveagh, who had been riding all day, nobody knew where, brought home a young rabbit to Bess. He laid

it beside her on the grass in the evening light, and prepared at once to depart again. But her exclamation of rapture delayed him.

'Oh,' said Bess. 'Oh! Where's your mother?'

She addressed the rabbit, which was petrified as a little image with terror, having been carried for an hour in a gentleman's pocket.

'I shot the mother,' said Iveagh.

'You didn't!' She gazed frightened, indignant, kneeling upon the grass, the rabbit in her hands. 'Oh, you're always shooting things. Go away!'

'Why?' said Iveagh: and prepared to stay at once: he had not meant to, previously. He stopped, hung about, pretended to whistle, and picked up Bess's drawing-book.

'You're a murderer,' said Bess, cherishing the orphan against her white neck. 'Red-handed,—I hate you. Iveagh, I don't want you to look at that. Put it down—' Pause. 'Please.'

Iveagh put it down. 'What did you kill it for?' said Bess.

'Why wouldn't I, when the place is rotten?' said Iveagh, his eyes straying. 'They're gnawin' up Marchant's young trees. Marchant gettin' frisky at Oxford,—wired me to see to it,—so I went.'

'Why didn't you kill *this*, then?' Bess's accusing eyes were upon him.

'Thought you'd like it,' mumbled Iveagh. His errant gaze met hers a second. 'Do you?'

'Yes. Of course. It's as soft as—soft. Where are you going now?'

'Home to dinner.'

'Wickford will be horribly cross with you,' said Bess. 'He's had a horrid day.'

'I wouldn't make a third,' remarked Iveagh, with the shadow of a smile. 'Addy in a wax isn't entertainin'.'

'There! You know all about it. Of course he told me,—at least not about her. Why couldn't you be nice, and go? He's always doing things for you.'

Iveagh lifted his eyebrows, or rather one of them; and prepared again to depart. 'Come up,' he said, in the act of leaving, 'and see my Uncle Giles to-morrow.'

'Good gracious! Why?'

'Only he's worth seein'.'

Bess considered whether she could venture. She decided her courage would not stand it. 'I can't,' she said, 'unless your mother asks me. Or Wickford.'

'Hullo! Why Wick more'n me?'

'Because,' said Miss Ryeborn very clearly, 'he is the owner of the house you are asking me to.'

'Good night,' said Iveagh.

'Good night.' Then a soft call. 'Iveagh,—thank you.'

He swung round wondering, saw the child-rabbit clasped to her throat as she knelt, and had the thanks explained. He only looked direct at the sight a moment, with that odd gaze of his, at once deliberate and furtive, as though the use of his eyes was destined really to something quite different. Then he went.

'Oh, goodness,' whispered Bess to the little rabbit. 'I love him. I *love* him so. . . . I don't know why.'

X

WICKFORD

THINGS were in this condition—when Lise came home.

‘Hard *luck*, Nesta!’ said Rick, when the news reached his wife. Rick, occupied with articles, did not trouble much, as a rule, to enter into the budding romances of his district, but he knew when Nesta was contented, as he knew when she was bothered, and he guessed this thunderclap might lay low her hopes.

The Duchess brought the news. Harassed by Oxboroughs, who would not go, the Duchess was very downright on the subject,—her expressions hurt Ernestine, who upheld that Lise had done no wrong. Lise had been too devoted, if anything, trying to follow Mark into unfit regions whither his work conveyed him, instead of staying where put upon the healthful heights. And so, of course, her health broke down: and Mark, much worried, seized command and sent her back to England. Lise, who was miserable at leaving Mark,—but simply loved to be commanded,—came: stipulating a short visit only before she returned to him and her duties.

Such behaviour, by all the rights of things, should satisfy Gertrude, who idealised Mark: but Gertrude was not so easily satisfied, in the circumstances. She said, Mark’s wife or no, she wouldn’t have the girl, nothing would induce her. Nor, she implied, would

Ernestine have Lise, if she had any regard for friendship, far-sightedness, or general good feeling.

Ernestine differed here. She differed essentially with Gertrude, though she found, at short notice, the difference hard to explain. First and foremost, Lise, if in England, must come to Holmer. There was no escaping it, possibly,—that at least her friend should see. The Duchess was Captain Mark's godmother, relation, and especial patroness. The district was Lise's former home. The family Fitzmaurice, it was true, had moved to Richmond after the girl's marriage, but that made no difference,—all her old friends were here.

Well then, so far clear : the delicate, dangerous Lise must come. The next point was harder to evolve. It was better she should come, better for everybody, and, in a way, for Iveagh. Lise at Richmond, to Iveagh, was questionably more dangerous than Lise in India, and certainly more dangerous than Lise at arm's length. It was not possible for Ernestine to explain to Iveagh's mother how she knew this, the Duchess was so little aware of her son's construction. There was no question of forgetting, for Iveagh. That often-stated advantage of Lise at a distance did not exist. His hunger for her,—wearing, aching hunger,—wherever it was placed, between body and soul, between heart and imagination, was not to be reduced by losing sight of her. Surely Gertrude might guess he was not that sort of boy ! To have her in England, and just beyond reach, as her parents' present home would be, was the surest way of maddening her attraction, of inflaming him, body and soul, anew. To have her here, quite suddenly, quite simply, under his eyes at Hatchways, Lise as the wife of Mark, devoted to

Mark, dreaming of Mark,—it would be poignant, of course, but less perilous,—if only Gertrude would see !

Gertrude did not,—ever. When Ernestine wrote to Richmond to invite Mrs. Elphinstone, in the last week of March, to Hatchways, the Duchess, by her change of manner, very nearly threw her off. It was so simple, in the circumstances, the Duchess thought, to be rude to Lise,—brutal to her, as a possible scandal to a Suir,—Ernestine did not think so. Lise, in herself, was not a scandal : she was mischievous at worst, barely more than became so exquisitely pretty a girl. Lise was delicate—Mark wanted her cared for—that finished it. All sick and weary people, who had ever been friendly there, came to Hatchways to recuperate. And Lise had been friendly,—sweet very often to Ernestine. A wild thing of nineteen, half the district sighing after her,—of course Ernestine had taken charge. Why, she had even cried to her her first confession of love for Mark. . . . Was that not a bond, and lasting ?

‘ No,’ said the Duchess.

So the strain on the former friendship grew very marked. It waxed daily. It emerged, unadorned, in the Duchess’s letters to such Oxboroughs as were distant, and those Oxboroughs smiled. Gertrude ‘ s’emballait,’ they implied, so heedlessly, and cast off with a like ease. Isabel, Oliver, and Giles, still on the premises, took in the facts beneath their eyes by degrees, and made remarks on them. The chief thing they observed was that it spoiled Gertrude’s temper, and made her say things to them which (as the prettiest and mildest of the Oxboroughs) they did not expect her to say.

‘ Gertrude seems to be rubbed up,’ said Giles to Oliver after a week of it. But they did not take the

best way to relieve their nephew and remedy matters,—which was to go. It happened that Wickford's stable, filled with Iveagh's bargains, suited these Oxboroughs : so they stayed, and used it.

Wickford took the news of the reappearance of Lise in silence. He found nothing to say when his mother told him the fact, wreathed in commentary concerning Ernestine's obstinacy and strange lack of taste. The Duke was dealing with his uncles at the time single-handed—not that he had not really had to do so throughout—for Iveagh was away. Right off the scene, not merely lurking. Du Frettay had been summoned, or summoned himself, to an aviation meeting ; and Iveagh went with him, varying the programme in du Frettay's interest by ' lookin' in ' on Marchant at Oxford, and getting him to disclose some of the ' shows ' of that beloved retreat. Wickford let his brother go without a warning, for he had, unlike his mother, a complete confidence in the Frenchman's good breeding and good sense. It was enough for Wickford that du Frettay was staying with Mrs. Redgate, even had not Sir George's high opinion of his origins backed her up. Origins, to a Suir, meant much,—meant all, in short. Origins, to an Oxborough, meant the impossibility of doing certain things, all of which Suirs did constantly : and the advisability of doing others, which Suirs as often as not left out. Perhaps the ideas of the race du Frettay did not tally with the ideas of racial Suir completely : but they were far nearer than Oxborough and anything French could ever be.

' I feel as if I ought to apologise, Wick,' said Ernestine, when at last he got away alone to Hatchways to see her about it.

'Oh, you needn't fag,' said Wickford. 'If you'd not taken the girl, I should have had to, o' course, and then—' he flung himself down, with excessive nonchalance, into a seat half-turned from her—'there we'd be!'

'I hadn't thought of that,' admitted Ernestine. Unseen behind him, her look melted. Wick's rare 'I' was as stately as it was simple. No artificial dignities his mother lent him really equalled his own, had she ever allowed him to assume it. Just once or twice, when the Duchess omitted to worry him in public, or when he forgot her ever-impending presence, she had noticed that manner of his descend, surprised.

'No, you never think o' me striking, do you?' said Wickford, flicking the dust off his boot with his whip as he gazed downward. 'Only him.'

'Gently,' said Ernestine's manner, as it said to the Suirs, not infrequently.

'Beastly sorry, Mrs. Redgate,' said Wickford,—the other side of him. He turned his eyes, and about half himself, in her direction. 'It's jolly good of you to do this, really,—it's our job, by rights. She'll be better here, of course,—poor little girl. No harm in her, beyond that,—never was.' Another pause, then a painful breath. 'Suppose I've got to tell him,—Mother won't.'

'I will, if it bothers you,' said Ernestine in the next pause. Wickford's face had grown blank, as it always did when he faced a delicate business. His thoughts grew blank, very often, simultaneously.

'I expect I'd best,' he replied, gazing in front of him, dragging at his lip in painful abstraction,—both brothers shaved clean.

'Why? Why, Wickford? Don't you trust him to behave?'

'Not I,' said the little Duke. 'No chance of it,—now.'

'Like touching dynamite, do you think?'

After a dubious glance in her direction—'You don't know what it is,' growled Wickford.

In the next interval, he realised by degrees what he had said, and woke right out of his trance, blushing scarlet. 'Mrs. Redgate, I'm sorry,' he stammered, drawing in his feet. 'I never meant——'

She broke into laughter, holding out her hand. 'Do *you* know what it is?' she asked him.

'Shouldn't wonder,' said Wickford, after some time. A false step of that sort threw him out in dialogue dreadfully. 'Needn't think I'm a saint, anyhow,' he contended.

'I don't,—Bess doesn't either.'

'Bess?' His eyes reached hers.

'She told Rick once that she thought neither of you would die young of saintliness.'

'She did? Well, I'm obliged to her. I only wish some others had her sense.'

'You are not in love with her, at least,' reflected Ernestine. 'You are making that pretty clear. I wonder—if it should be only—it would be like you.'

'You don't want to go to heaven before Iveagh,' she suggested, looking up at him as he rose to take leave.

'Not likely,' said the Duke. 'Goo'-bye.'

'Good-bye. Your uncle and Adelaide, is it?'—for the usual clipped echo of the horse-hoofs had come to her ears.

He nodded, watching across her the horses' heads pass along the lane.

'Rotten position for a man,' he spluttered suddenly, 'if Mother knew, setting me up to talk to him! Fairly

amazin' she doesn't grasp it, considerin',—but there's no lettin' a woman know! You needn't laugh. Why, look here, when the kid gets on to Lise, it's all I can do not to be jealous. . . . You'd not understand. It's rippin' to see him go off—er—decent or no. Not likely I'd tell Mother that, though,—wouldn't suit her, all my ideas. She doesn't follow common little cattle like Iveagh and me. I rag him, since I must,—then I translate it, and tell her,—but I feel a fool, o' course. Why, if I could love a girl like that,—a real girl,—not a common charmer——' He drew in again perforce, and just in time.

'You will some day,' said Ernestine.

'Please God,' said the Duke profanely. 'Doesn't look like it. There are the nags. . . . Look here, now——' He returned to his duty, suddenly. 'I'd better write to the boy, strikes me. Then he could work some of it off on du Frettay,—he's a safe man.'

'Do you think so?'

'Oh yes, he's all right,—bother Aunt Isabel. It's like this,—what do you want me to tell him, exactly? How much of it?'

'All the facts, hadn't you better? He probably doesn't know them.'

'Not he. Mother hides Elphinstone's letters like the plague. As to *her*,' said Wickford, 'sometimes I thought the kid wanted to know. I don't see why he shouldn't, bein' interested. But Mother never sees things as I do. She writes such beastly good letters, Lise! So does Mark, of course, but——'

'Yes, I know,' said Ernestine. She recollected anew Bess's parallel from Victorian fiction, Philip and Guy. Mark's perfections, owing to the Duchess's care, weighed more heavily on Wickford than Iveagh.

'I'm afraid I've shown him a letter of Lise's before now,' she said.

'Have you?' said Wickford, his face clearing. 'Well, I'd sooner that,—natural somehow,—no point in treatin' a man like a girl. I say, then you think I needn't cut this business,—leave things out?'

'No. I should tell him she's ill, and why——'

'Cause she's too fond of Mark, you mean.' He sent her a quaint look round the corner, having subsided anew, hand in pocket, on the arm of a chair rather nearer the door.

'Yes. But I'm afraid,' confided Ernestine, 'Captain Elphinstone did not at all want her with him, this last time.'

'I see. Lise on duty—Lord, can't you hear 'em at it! . . . Oh, well, I'll disguise Mark's unwillingness. After all, it would have been for her good.' He glinted again.

'Don't you believe in Mark's fondness for Lise?' asked Ernestine.

'Oh yes,' said the Duke, rather hastily. 'He's as fond of her as his sort ever is. Don't imagine I mean anything different. As for her, there's no doubt of it, luckily. She thought worlds of him, when she left.'

'Worlds,' assented Ernestine.

'And if it's come down a little——'

'Go away and ride, Wick,' said Ernestine. 'You're jealous.'

'I'm jealous of any man on earth who marries a pretty girl,' explained Wickford. 'All of 'em. I've no down on Elphinstone, specially.'

'Haven't you, indeed!' She added suggestively—
'I've things to do.'

'But look here,' said Wickford, catching her arm

as she tried to pass him. 'I got hold of a letter of hers,—don't say it wasn't a jolly nice one,—in which she said——'

'Never mind. I should hope Lise may laugh at her husband. She wouldn't be Lise if she did not.'

'No, that's it,' said the Duke. 'She said—an' speaking of Iveagh too——'

'Please go, Wickford. Adelaide and Sir Giles are waiting.'

'I'll tell you another time,' he declared, rising at ease from his low seat. 'As for the way she sends her love to all of us, at the tail of Addy's letters, it's enough to——' The whole of Wickford contracted in silent mirth, and with a widespread gesture of his whip, far from ungraceful, he finally left the room.

'You're anything but a dull boy, really,' reflected Mrs. Redgate, as she went on to the next thing. 'I wonder Rick can't see it. . . . Mark indeed!'

The foregoing dialogue contained the first hint Ernestine or anybody had that Wickford,—who always knew his own mind so much better than other people knew it for him,—was courting Miss Ryeborn in his late sedulous and serious fashion, solely in his brother's interest.

Even Ernestine found it hard to believe at first. It was, to say the least of it, an out-of-the-way proceeding. For another thing, Ernestine had really accustomed herself, by now, to the other or first impression, which had been Gertrude's too. Yet clearly, it was not an impossible course, granted that kind of genius of good sense Wickford had, in which she shared and sympathised. His mother, all his circle, were persistently on the edge of rudeness to Bess, enough to

frighten her. They displayed their feelings frankly enough to make her shrink away, drive her into those artistic fastnesses, that life of silence, into which she was already too willing to retreat. Iveagh the unaccountable attached her rarely, though he constantly hovered near. To engage Miss Ryeborn's attention, as it were, in Iveagh's interest, until that young gentleman should choose to see her eminent advantages, was—well, very like Wickford. It was like him too, once launched on so practical a course (to Suir ideas) not to observe that he was defeating his own ends by daily increasing his family's enmity to Bess.

After the news of Lise's coming, Wickford met Bess more carefully yet,—compassionately,—no doubt as an attempt to apologise. Not that Bess knew, of course, of Iveagh's devotion to the distant elf, and the concern it had occasioned to Iveagh's friends: that had never really spread beyond the immediate Holmer circle. Of these friends, the Redgates, Sir George, and Adelaide, alone knew the truth, and even for some of them, as we have seen, the truth was tempered. Sam Coverack had misdoubted it only at moments, and he had been one of the people most frequently in Iveagh's company. The Lise interlude about which Sam jested publicly, with which he made most play when he wished to exhibit the girl she had been, was the agreeable little diversion with Adelaide concerning the Duke. In the amusement of watching that—we fear, betting upon it—Sam had forgotten the chance of Iveagh altogether. Iveagh, melting into the scenery at will, was at all times easily overlooked.

Adelaide, of course, might have betrayed the secret of his unhappy passion to Bess, as she had practically done to Gabriel: but she did not care to. There was

no clear point to be scored by it, and she had in these days to make every point she was worth in Miss Ryeborn's company. From day to day, Adelaide grew more anxious, more angry. Never,—anyhow in her sight,—had Wick shown attentions of that sort to a girl before. His attentions to Lise had been mere pastime, compared with it. He could not—could not be serious! A girl from nowhere, a middle-class girl, with no connections, barely a penny to her name! . . . And yet, Wickford was serious.

Adelaide strove angrily. She shook out her feathers to the world. A girl of her make, with all the money she wants to back her, can do much when she tries. Wickford, bearing her various humours whenever they met, and watching her peacock tail-spreading in toilette, and sweep, and style, began to realise perforce the little misunderstanding to which his assiduity at Miss Ryeborn's elbow laid him open.

We regret to say that Wickford, when he did so realise it, was, in the first place, exquisitely amused. The thing that amused him most—apart from the ordinary amusement to which eligible man is prone—was that all these nice people who knew him best imagined he would do such a thing. . . . Even Mrs. Redgate!

Not but what Miss Bess would make a pretty Duchess, Wickford allowed, so far as looks and bearing went. She was an absolutely ripping girl, good as they make them, sweet to consult, supple to manage, and uncommon clever with her pencil 'into the show.' But—shade of his father!—did they imagine for an instant that would do for him? Had they a notion of the house his fortunes required him to build, or to rebuild? His mother should have a better idea of him, at least. Mrs.

Redgate, for once, might be allowed scarcely to know about it.

Wickford's ideas, in short, would vastly have surprised Adelaide, and his mother, and Sam, and everybody who regarded him as homely and simple and sentimental, and wanting in sufficiency and self-regard. But he did not let Adelaide know them. That was a little beyond the strength of eligible—or Irish—man to attain.

He let Adelaide peacock it, setting herself off against the other girl as women do, and watched her thoughtfully. He had still, for all his mother's teasing, not actually set her aside. She was almost everything he wanted, as a fact, except lovable. And even so, Wickford was sorry for her at times. She had a wretched life of it, as he knew from Mrs. Redgate, amid her home dissensions. Her father, in his worst moods, was a beast. Her mother, friend of a Princess, would very likely get a permanent post at Court. Her parents' generous intentions regarding her were unquestionable,—‘pots’ of money,—every eye of her peacock train was touched with gold.

And she was a handsome girl, and she cared for him—possibly. She was giving him daily reason to suppose she did.

Alas, had any kind spirit been at hand to whisper to Adelaide how golden her chance was with the Duke, just these very days of Iveagh's absence when she thought it least, before, in a fit of common jealousy, spite and heedlessness, she flung it away!

What had not struck Wickford in the course of his various debating was that Adelaide in her present princess, peacock mood, would ‘wipe his eye’ in the matter of Lise, by informing Iveagh. That this was

a possible 'score' for a sporting young lady had not occurred to him, since really he could not follow the bearing of all her scores. Adelaide had long known she could 'draw' Wick by teasing Iveagh, especially on the subject of Lise. It was an advantage she used in private, not infrequently. Baiting Iveagh because Wickford advised her not, was quite a natural diversion, as was any other method of pricking Wickford to talk to her, quarrel with her, or show his hand. The Suirs had a canny little way of concealing their hands, for all their easy-going friendliness, that was maddening to a girl like Adelaide. Now, when this excellent chance of baiting Iveagh, driving him off his head for the public amusement, fell to her own hand through the Duchess's indiscretion, she used it without delay.

XI

CAPTURE OF GABRIEL

GABRIEL and Iveagh had a nice time. They did not stop at Oxford, though they let Marchant know they were staying with him, for his soul's good. They saw over a great library, and a historic Hall, and a very particular Press, and a few other improving things, in his society : then they branched out a little, and saw a public school, and a man-of-war, and the House of Lords, in the company of some people Iveagh annexed in London ; and a motor-works, and a cricket match, and a stable at Epsom, all on their own. They did the aviation meeting, du Frettay in his rights and glory, and Iveagh incognito and inquisitive. They went to a concert called Irish at Regent's Hall, and immediately after to the circus with the performing tigers at Reading, in order to take the taste of the concert out of their mouths. It so happened the prima-donna had given one of Lise's songs, though du Frettay could not know that. However, taking Iveagh's word for it that nothing was right with the lady in toilette, taste, mind or morals, he followed him on to the tigers willingly, and instantly had his reward in a fine specimen of ancient Saxon humour presented by the circus clown.

They also saw some quite magnificent riding on the part of two ' Mexican ' girls, who, when cross-examined

by Iveagh in the coulisses, turned out to come from Cork. So, in short, Lise and her song were indirectly avenged: and Iveagh and Gabriel went back to the austere delights of a Sunday at Oxford, temporarily satisfied and relieved in mind.

By the way, and imperceptibly to both of them, they laid the foundations of the kind of friendship that stays. They dovetailed, Iveagh and Gabriel, if they did not coincide. Their humour matched—and that is such an immense thing—almost to a shade. There was eight years' difference in age: but then Iveagh, with his inheritance and experience, was aged or possibly ageless. He had never had the fledgeling simplicity of the Saxon. His outlook on the world was seasoned by centuries of grief, and strife, and wrong. This—what we complacently name the Celtic melancholy—made him and du Fretay practically equals in experience. None of the blacker evils of the world surprised him: none of the sweeter, more evanescent delicacies of the world escaped his subtle sense. On this latter side Gabriel could actually learn; and, armed with his own incisive and individualist Gallic wits, he explored his store of observation curiously.

Still unaware to himself, calling him most of the time a dull boy, Gabriel delighted in his company, his side-long sudden glances, quaint angles of view, and the strict sane sense of his remarks. There is no good sense like it, really,—the practical Germanic gets nowhere near. A sense that takes in half a dozen points of view, as it must in any race with the real dramatic gift, is surely so much more valuable than a sense which takes in one! It is also instantaneously adaptable. Gabriel tried to picture Iveagh in France, in his own delicately-arrogant, though simple-seeming

surroundings : and saw at once he would do there, as easily as among Sam and the rustic hawbucks, or among Ernestine, Bess and the cats. . . . Then he reflected on aristocracy, genuine aristocracy, and thought of those circus girls' 'Yes, m'lord,'—'No, m'lord,'—while brogue was exchanging fast amid the sawdust and gas. They had heard his name, doubtless : but the manner was clear,—very clear for such girls as those. A world of aristocracy cleaves the high race from the low race, even in Ireland. *Even* in Ireland ! He noted a few remarks on that.

So, finally, they said farewell to Marchant, and du Frettay said all the correct things, which Iveagh omitted, and Iveagh promised, if he could dodge Miss Ryeborn anyhow, to shoot a few more rabbits, and Marchant sent his love (or something he certainly meant for it) to Mrs. Redgate, and they went back to Holmer Hatch by the usual train.

And then, without a warning it happened ! The overcharged cloud broke in Gabriel's presence.

'Iveagh, my dear !' said Ernestine.

She and Bess were sewing peacefully in her own particular little bower in the Hatchways garden,—really hers, reserved to the household,—when he burst through the leaves.

He was heated, and white, and staggering,—scarcely able to stand, for he caught at the pergola-pole. The idea that he was drunk took possession of her immediately. How could Ernestine avoid it ?—knowing that deadly temptation of the modern world, latter-day Lethe, so easy to his hand, who needed to forget. He had looked that way more than once, she knew, since the moment of his first despair. All his brother's

warnings had not withheld him once or twice, say in experiment, from crossing the line.

‘Don’t go,—don’t let her go,’—stammered Iveagh. For Bess, to whom her aunt’s anxiety and horror communicated itself almost before utterance, had arisen, pale as he was, laying aside her work mechanically.

‘You wish Bess to stay?’

It was a test, that question : and she moved between them, markedly. Bess looked at both wide-eyed, wondering, gathering, hardly able to doubt, such was the stern ring of her tone.

‘She needn’t bother, it’s all right,’ he said unsteadily. ‘It’s only I had to—could I sit down?’

Bess’s eyes met her aunt’s, as he took the deck-chair she advanced without apology, and leaning forward, dropped his head in his hands. Wise in the many chances of a hunting-community, they had another idea, and again, almost simultaneously.

‘You did not fall off your horse?’ said Mrs. Redgate, coming behind him, and taking his head in her hands. All the same she could barely credit it,—Iveagh and whatever horse were so little apt to part company. Yet she could, for the moment, think of nothing else.

‘Horse? I hadn’t got one. They had the horses,—four of ’em. We’d just come from town. No,—the other place, wasn’t it? I forget.’

Forget! Yes, these were the symptoms of concussion rather than intemperance, decidedly. No doubt he was hurt, her boy. At once her friendly arms slipped across his shoulders, clasped the wrists of his hands, apologising, of course, for her suspicions. ‘Don’t try to remember——’ she was beginning in the right nurse’s tone, which is far from gentle, when he broke in.

‘ But I must—it was Addy—I wasn’t dreamin’, can’t have been. It was at the station,—just outside it. I came on to ask you. Addy said——’

Then she saw it, of course. Conviction flashed, and action simultaneously. Wickford’s careful letter had gone astray. Adelaide’s, of all unfriendly, hostile hands, had shot the bolt. Before an audience,—uncles,—she had seen the party start. Still holding him, she turned.

‘ Go to the house, Bess, dear,’ she directed. ‘ No, nothing,—send nothing. He will be all right.’

She knew though as she spoke that she must tell Bess everything. Already she had debated it, but there was no escaping it now. The boy under her hands was sobbing almost, in deadly emotion, just as he had been at the very worst. And why?—clear as daylight, to anyone knowing Adelaide. She, Lise’s rival, have mercy? Why should she? Chaffingly, idly, with silly circumvention and senseless enjoyment, she had reopened the wound,—in public, that was still the worst. The pair of stupid military uncles, Sam the follower, du Fretay the foreigner too. . . . Adelaide, to whom love, the great power that shakes and welds the world, was unknown except as a show, a vulgar entertainment, a freak of nature to be played with, played at, played upon . . . a girl, Ernestine had sometimes thought, like innumerable English girls, without any of the forms of heart. Not even the friend’s,—not even the old comrade’s,—since this was the way she treated Wickford. Mrs. Redgate saw the ‘ score ’ very well, since it matched other scores of which Adelaide had boasted in her presence. But somehow, those had never shocked her : now she was shocked.

There was another charge in her mind besides the brutal ill-taste of it,—that of cowardice. She grasped as nobody else did, certainly not the brother, and doubtfully du Frettay, the extent to which Iveagh was in Adelaide's hands. Gabriel, ever since that first day at the stations, had been surprised at intervals by his submission, as much as by the carelessness of the girl's baiting,—she seemed to know herself safe. So Adelaide was, only Gabriel missed the reason. Iveagh, in the matter of the Courtiers, was not in his brother's confidence. He did not ask confidence from his elder and head of his clan concerning his matrimonial projects: that was not the custom, could not be done. Thus, placing Adelaide in his world's scheme as a probable sister-in-law and future Duchess, the lordly central Suir idea protected her perfectly. She might, for Iveagh, already have been Wick's wife.

And Adelaide knew it! She knew, from Ernestine's hints and protests, even had not her own 'sporting' instinct spied her advantage out. Hers was the sporting instinct of the ferreter, not fair-play big game, like Sir George. It distressed Mrs. Redgate particularly when women, strong, young, with all their chances, exhibit their primæval cowardice in this way. It would have distressed and disgusted her, even had not this boy, proud, passionate, and inexpressive, been the other party concerned.

She swept in the rest of the evidence, when Bess had gone, without much trouble, though she hardly needed it.

'She's ill?' Iveagh asked at last, coming out of his hands. Of course, he had not even the facts,—facts were the last things Adelaide gave.

'No, not to matter. Tired, you know. We thought

of getting her here to rest. I won't though, if it hurts you——'

'Why would it hurt me?' he shot swiftly. 'It was only she said *case*,—case at Hatchways,—Ernestine's latest,—that's you. I didn't trouble just then, I was thinkin' of Emer, she was ridin' her.' (Emer was Lise's mare.) 'She always fetches out Emer when I'm away. I told him last time I wouldn't have it.' (Him was Wickford.) 'He might see to it, stand up to her a bit in the stable. I can't be always bothered with the girl she is.'

'Go on,' said Ernestine, as he waited to gather his thoughts. He looked quite exhausted, blue beneath the eyes, as he lay searching for sentences, catching the first words that came. His eyes themselves were darkened and languid with the look she knew,—the other-world look of Lise—and though shifting rapidly about to help his thoughts, they never met hers, as he proceeded. We quote the account, with a note on the text occasionally; for certain of Iveagh's tricks, such as his liberal use of the personal pronouns for individuals he affected, made him a little hard to understand. Mrs. Redgate was used to him, of course: having been herself one of his principal 'she's for eleven years back.

'So then she said (Adelaide) beginnin' with an E. And some other ass said two E's,—and that started them off. And I didn't think of it—how would I?—didn't trouble to, anyway,—rottin' the lot. E.F. she was in her letters,—E.F.M. was what she liked. She's right enough too—that lot of 'em ought to have it. . . .'

'Brilliant, Adelaide,' thought Ernestine, watching him. 'Most amusing, making him guess.'

'You and Bess are E.R.,' pushed on Iveagh. 'There's that Ellis-woman Mother has,—and Lady Earraid, she's R.E. Besides, spellin's such a rotten game! . . . So I just observed I was sick of it, kind o' style to stop the goat sniggerin',—(Sam was the goat)—and Uncle Oliver seemed amazed at me, wistful and wonderin',—and the other one was reddish,—and *he* got a hold on my arm. *He* set out to dodge her (du Frettay, evidently), but no chance, once the girl had put the game up,—that game,—I could have told him there was no chance. Best let her drip and have done with it,' said Iveagh, shifting the image competently, —'that's what he said to me, more or less,—but I had to stop. . . . So, after some more truck, the girl said she'd whisper it to Emer,—whisperin', I didn't like that. What's she want talkin' to her,—ridin's bad enough. . . . So I came on to you,' he concluded lamely. 'See you on the quiet,—get some sense out——'

'Sense,' thought Ernestine, 'and I received you as if you were drunk!' She offered him the sense that was his right, immediately.

'I have invited Lise to come here soon,' she said, 'Monday week. But she is in England for another month or so,—would you rather we put it off?'

'No, no,' he shot again, impatient. 'She'd best get here. You'd better see to her,—it was not that I was meanin' at all.'

It was a most complete testimonial to Mrs. Redgate's powers,—far better than Wickford's, since Iveagh exacted the best in earth and heaven for Lise.

'She is not ill,' she once more assured him gently. 'Not really. That was another of Adelaide's jokes.'

His eyes, out of the falling dusk, rested on her for a fraction of time. 'Why has he sent her off?' he said.

‘Mark? Because she would follow him, here, there, and everywhere. You know what a rebel she is.’

Iveagh knew, well enough. ‘Funny to send her off,’ he repeated.

Ernestine was driven to excuse Mark. ‘He sent her out of harm’s way, and home was easiest. He wanted home air, for Lise. So I offered to take her.’

‘Oh yes,’ he said. ‘Why didn’t Mother?’

Wretched boys for questions! She was held up.

‘Wickford would have——’ she started.

‘All right,’ said Iveagh. ‘You’ve all been scrappin’ and me out of it.’ He yawned a little, and considered it, resting his head on his hand.

‘She been down on you?’ he enquired casually,—meaning his mother this time.

‘Yes.’

‘Raggin’ him?’

‘Oh, I don’t think so. I got the ragging.’

‘You?’

In the next silence, she had the impression,—no new one,—that he was taking charge. His real self in the twilight, attentive and gracious, came through. ‘Gracious’ was the word Mrs. Redgate (who had not a large vocabulary) invariably applied, in memory, to Iveagh’s father. It was also the word, to her mind, most adapted to the underpart of him. From the age of twelve he had condescended, at times, to take charge of her, and it never failed to delight her when he did. What his mother had missed!—thought Ernestine, often. But then Gertrude was the monumental type of mother,—quite marvellous. She seemed to think even sons like Wickford grew on every bush!

‘It wasn’t worth it,’ he said, having thought it out carefully. ‘Scrappin’.’

'But we did not scrap. Your mother,' said Mrs. Redgate, gravely, 'is much too well-bred.'

'Oh, go on,' returned Iveagh. 'She did most of it. Can't see you quarrellin', quite.' He just moved a hand, in her direction.

'Thank you.' She took the hand. 'Iveagh, will you stay to dinner with me?' she ventured. She was a little afraid of him to-night.

'No,—the man's comin'.' (Du Frettay.) 'I'd better get up on home. There's something I meant to say, before I did, though. Wait a sec.' He sought it. 'While she's here, stoppin' along with you,—Lise—'

'Yes,' said Ernestine submissively. He had dropped the name with the greatest care and delicacy, just that there should be no mistake.

'Only, I'll not come often. Not awfully often. I'll not play the ass, the way his little spirit's distressed about me in the evenin's.' (Wickford, beyond a doubt.) 'He can be easy,—you can let him know. I want to be over with this now, if you don't mind,—it's not been so enticin' I'd ask for more of it.' He waited for a time,—the right time too. This was a great occasion, and he was letting her know it, while he guarded her carelessly. 'I'll get things goin' to-morrow or the next day, once I see them straight. To-night I cannot,—that girl's done me,—I give her credit.' He shut his eyes, and pressed his fingers to them. 'Only I'll stick it out. I'll—see you through. I'll—take the pledge.' Silence. She longed both to thank and bless him, but dared not, he sat so still. This was his offering to her; not Lise, she knew it. He had made it completely clear.

'You needn't think I can't if I want,' he resumed, dropping his hands. 'That's how you all go wrong.

I can do the polite an' pleasin',' said Iveagh, casting about wearily for images, 'as well as my brother in his sword and stockin's, when he goes trucklin' to the English Court.'

Silence: Mrs. Redgate, a most loyal subject, still submissive. Nor did she resent the image of Wickford, another perfectly loyal subject, truckling,—Iveagh had her in hand.

'I'll not go stravaguin,' he pursued, dropping into deep melancholy. 'I'll stop about. I'll exercise Emer when she's not wantin' her,—you can tell her that. Emer's all right, anyhow,—will be. Dare say she didn't care for that girl to-day——'

'I shouldn't think her health had suffered,' said Ernestine, for his melancholy had grown fixed.

'Can't say, you never know,' he returned, with the utmost gravity. 'I'll see to her to-morrow, not to-night.' Pause. 'Sure she's not ill? Not anyhow?' This was not Emer, but Lise.

'Quite sure.' Ernestine was convinced now that every chance of the first three years of matrimony had been swept by his half-paralysed thought. Or was it only the expression that was paralysed?—more probable. His thoughts throughout the interview, shattered as he looked, had been well in front of hers.

'Dash, how giddy I feel,' he remarked as he got up. 'Funny thing. You thought I'd been soakin', didn't you? . . . I say, by the way,—he held her simply by the upper arm to steady himself,—'talkin' of giddy, those machines of his are toppin'. More in them than I thought.'

'What machines?' He nodded towards the house. Now, there were only two gentlemen, at present, in Hatchways house.

‘Iveagh, you didn’t go up?’ Ernestine was moved. ‘No, you are naughty, both of you! You said you’d tell Wick or me before you did.’

‘I forgot,’ said Iveagh, with something like his ordinary expression. ‘Don’t excite,’ he added persuasively. ‘I told the Press-fellow there not to mention it. . . . The noise is enough to turn you silly, though. They’ll have to see to that. We didn’t go far. I couldn’t ’a got killed,—not badly killed,—I dare say I’d ’a got over it.’ He looked her in the eyes, infinite tragedy in his, the tragedy of all the ages. ‘Mention that to Mother when you make it up with her,’ he said. ‘Good night.’

‘It was cruel,’ said du Frettay after dinner, ‘and stupid consummately,—oh, consummately! And especially do I pity him that his uncles know. His friend I think will have mercy: that young man has some relics of sense.’

‘Oh, Sam is no harm,’ said Ernestine. ‘But of course, he admires Adelaide.’

‘I cannot think, when he shall reflect upon it, he will admire her,’ said du Frettay, earnestly. ‘It reminded me so strongly of something I saw lately—at Reading—the circus clown. It was curious, indeed, to have the two impressions so close,—I noted them.’

‘Oh, but really!’ said Ernestine dimpling. ‘Rick, speak up for us. We can do better than that.’

‘Go on,’ encouraged Rick.

Rick was delighted to have du Frettay back. He and Ernestine had had Oxboroughs to all kinds of meals, constantly, during the interval, in order to relieve the Duchess.

‘It was of the nature,’ said Gabriel, settling in his

chair, 'of what we call the "farce d'écolier," but that terminates—comes to an end—as a rule, at twelve years old. At eleven, we will say, for justice. It emerges again later, I do not deny it, in the ebullience of admissibility,—that is to say, first examination results. But even so,—however idiotic,—the inspiration, the motive, is respectable. There is one little matter I remember, concerned with a hearse, and horses,—the coffin absent. It was brutal, yes,—yet well inspired. The motive was a just one,—as it were, necessary. It made one reflect——'

He reflected. Rick, looking at his blue eyes bent on his boyhood's memories, wondered which of his college professors had gone down to an early grave in consequence of the inspired motive he was dreaming of.

'But this,' resumed Gabriel presently, 'had no such excuse. None. It was stupid merely,—*formidablement bête*. I regret to be obliged to my own terms. She played with she knew not what,—quite purposeless—' He glanced at Ernestine.

'Quite,' she said.

'Having no knowledge of the thing she played with—' He paused again, waiting.

'Go on,' said Rick. 'You'll get nothing out of her.'

'But she proved—I think she proved it,' argued du Fretay with both of them.

Rick glanced at his wife in turn. 'We trust,' he said, 'Wickford will reason it out.'

'Excellent,' said Gabriel, subsiding. 'You take my point. I trust he will.'

'I wish you wouldn't make points, you and Rick,' said Ernestine.

'Pourquoi?' asked Gabriel.

'It's his nature,' said Rick.

‘And yet,’ said Gabriel to Rick, pursuing, ‘it takes a man of intelligence to reason it out, and the Duke may—well, he may not manage it.’

‘You’re very unjust to Wickford, both of you,’ said Ernestine.

‘Imagine,’ said Gabriel, looking at the ceiling, ‘attached to so sensitive a gift for humour, what Lord Wickford might have to suffer. And his guests. . . . I may smoke, Madame?’

‘Yes,—and please don’t ask.’

‘I forget I shall not ask, invariably. I will note it. Ouff, I feel so well this evening,’ said Gabriel suddenly. ‘It is *that*.’ He circled a hand in the air. ‘It comes back upon me, when I am on earth again.’

‘You had no business to go without warning us,’ said Mrs. Redgate, very gravely.

‘You would have been anxious?’ As she did not answer, working.—‘It is habit,’ he pursued. ‘I never tell my mother till I am down again. When I am completely down,—most of me,—I send her a *carte-lettre* to quiet her. I have found it better so. . . . I asked Iveagh—Suir, pardon,—when we were up, if he would come with me to France. He said “Yes” without emotion,—without a blink. He is a person I could fly with frequently—quite often—’

‘If you do——’ said Ernestine, stopping her work.

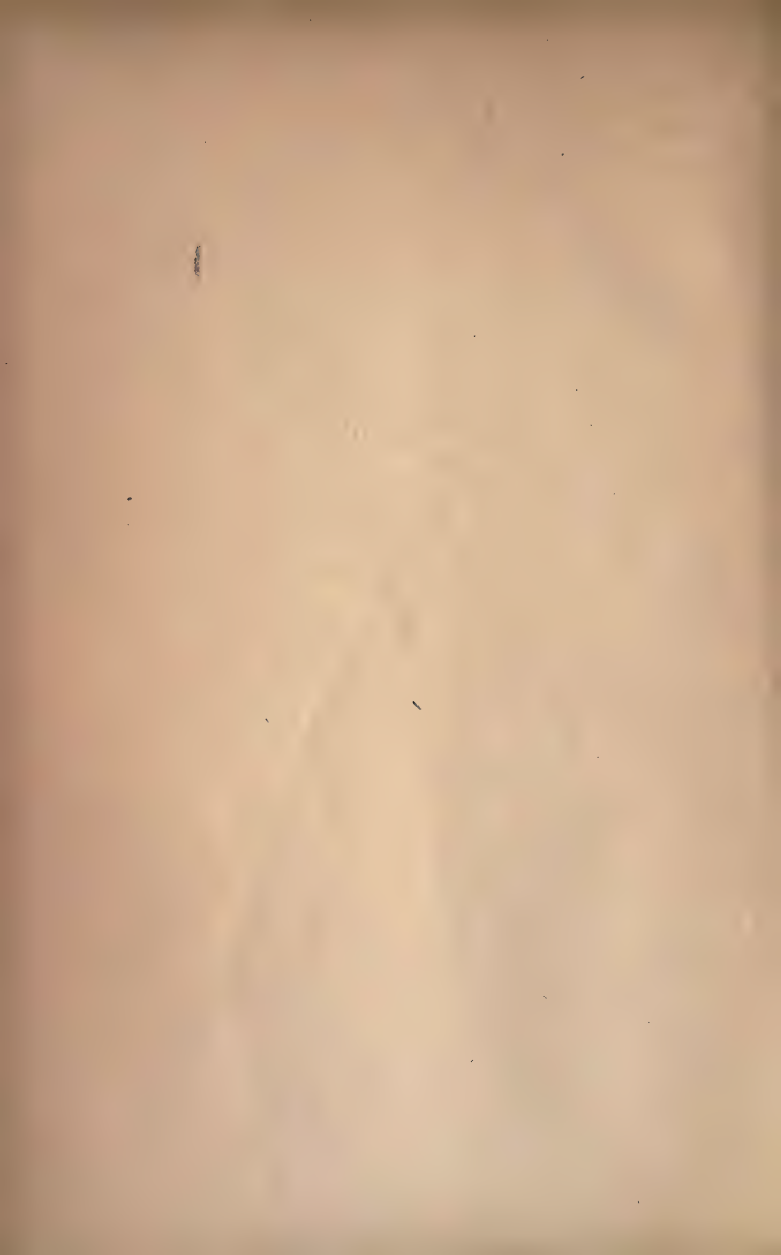
‘I shall not. He rides too well. Those do not need to fly, they are wasted. Their limbs are wasted,’ explained M. du Frettay, crossing his own. ‘It is another make.’

Mrs. Redgate’s look on his limbs across the hearth suggested that she thought all the same they might be wasted by the complicated fractures he seemed to court for them so earnestly. However, there was

nothing to be done about it, since his own mother was evidently helpless. So Ernestine said nothing, as usual, and sewed. Both her men under her eyes were very comfortable, two of her women dining at Holmer,—and Bess in bed.

She noted, though, his use of Iveagh's name, as she had noted Iveagh's equally flattering use of the pronoun for him. She thought she saw under his raillery and light treatment of Miss Courtier's 'clown-trick' the quick indignation of a friend. He had come round again, she thought, from his cynical outpost of observation, and was committed once more to the boy's party, in with the defence. He was so good for Iveagh. . . . He was fortunately of a race where courage and sensitiveness go hand in hand (as indeed does not real courage always?) and he was of those that hold seriously, like Sir George and all expert adventurers, that recklessness, for whatever cause, detracts from valour's worth. That was the friend Iveagh needed at this crisis, eminently all that. It was fortunate.

And he was nice,—courtly, gentle: Ernestine liked him. He was really approachable, affable in the French or Latin sense. Sir George had it too, that gentleness of the tamed eagle. It surprised her not the least, when her woman's mind swept about the foundations of things,—the family foundations,—that Sir George and this young man's father should have been friends.



PART II

XII

LISE

DU FRETTAY fell in love with Lise at first sight, confessed to a hopelessly broken heart at their second meeting, received Mrs. Elphinstone's insincere commiseration on his sad condition, and thenceforth tilted tranquilly with her as if he had known her all his life.

She was indeed a sweet little creature, light and airy, with a pallidly sallow skin, what Gabriel called 'cinder-coloured' hair, and dark brown eyes. She was liquid, like water, as Ernestine said, shimmering, shadowing, and reflecting, he was certain, at all times : but never more so than at the present time, so he gathered from her friends, because of the languor resulting from her shaken health. She made little of her health, when asked, but the eager, darting activity of her maidenhood, manifest in the innumerable stories current of her in the country-side, was checked, shattered for the moment, by the cruel chances of the Indian climate. She slipped about the walks at Hatchways, lay about on Ernestine's sofas and hammocks, almost as though crushed. She had quiet interludes when her eyes were still and dark, like pools, reflecting that strange new knowledge of wifehood, that strange patience that comes with marriage to flickering rebellious presences like hers. Gabriel the observer had marked that in many a clever woman previously,

during the interval between wifehood and maternity, which solves all.

But, like all natural transitions, simply reflected, it was beautiful. It made Lise more wonderful, much. She could never before, he was convinced, have been so entrancing, so provoking. For, roused to life and exchange, not a glance nor shaft of her ancient maiden armoury was wanting. Her flexible little rapier,—if a little out of practice, owing to her Mark's irreproachable equipment,—had never been allowed to rust. Lise, in whatever virtuous or exotic society, would have kept it in play.

Suir society responded at once, that was one of the first things du Fretay noticed : especially the head of it,—Wickford seemed to change from top to toe. Careful and troubled in advance, he let go most of his anxiety at the sight of her, and let her have it with him, as she pleased. It is possible, of course, that Lise and her like had always had it as they pleased, in private, with Wickford,—considering his high position, it may be better not to enquire. At least he was 'easy,' to quote Iveagh, quite remarkably from first meeting, and went on relaxing, rapidly. There was that about Mrs. Mark Elphinstone, the presence of her, the sight,—the sound above all,—which attuned her company, and comforted those Western hearts which, like the Duke's and Iveagh's, must feel Midland Holmer a 'fool of a place' at times.

Lise had, at least, to be looked at. It might have been regarded as heartless, considering Iveagh, but they all came out upon the Hatchways drive to look, when Lise and Emer, the first morning, fell into each other's arms. Wreathed in Lise's white arms, Emer endeavoured, all she knew, to return her kisses. Such

as Emer are sadly handicapped, when it comes to kissing, but, snuffing and mumbling with velvet lips, she did her best.

‘Oh, she’s being polite,—*oh*, she’s being polite to me,’ moaned Lise, her cinder-coloured head against Emer’s neck. ‘*Oh*, she doesn’t remember really, it’s only her beautiful, beautiful manners, all put on! Tell me you haven’t forgotten, my angel, the times we had in the ferns when you would eat them. And it’s only the scent that’s good for men and horses, never the taste. . . . I have seen nobody like you, Emer,—nobody! Nor you, will you just assure me? Best,—my most beautiful,—*Iveagh*, how do you do?’

‘You thought I was the groom,’ said Iveagh equally.

‘I did not,—I was coming on to you in the equestrian order of things.’ (A ridiculous expression, meaning nothing at all, but all Lise’s circle accepted it calmly.) ‘How nice it is to see you both,’ proceeded Mrs. Elphinstone, her hand in Wickford’s, perfectly natural tears in her lovely eyes. ‘Men without moustaches. *Oh*, if you knew what it means to me, home and Hatchways and the hairless men! Perhaps M. du Frettay has got one, but we will not look in his direction. . . . Very well, thank you, there was no illness in it, really, nothing at least all *this* will not soon cure. . . . Emer, your robe is all silver, glancing,—M. du Frettay calls it a robe. You must come out of the stables of the moon to look like that—’ She paused, as it were enquiring.

‘She comes out of mine,’ said Wickford.

‘And *what* do I owe you?’ said Lise,—carrying Wickford, prepared for most things, right off his feet by the one question in the world he thought she dared not ask. ‘Oh, but certainly’—seizing her advantage—‘I

shall pay her pension, had you not expected it? Or rather my hus——'

'If he dares!' spluttered Wickford. Then, as she merely shook with laughter, her head in Emer's neck,—
'Get out with you, Lise, insultin' me! You've just been studyin' all night for the worst thing you could say! As if we hadn't all ridden her up and down, every day of the week——'

'We have not all,' said Iveagh.

'Well, it was over Iveagh's body if we did not,' said the Duke, with a lack of strict sense that ran Lise's late effort very close. 'And most of us tried to climb onto her in your absence. Addy, for instance——'

'She did so twice,' said Iveagh, 'and no thanks to you if it was not twenty times——'

'*Hark* at him accounting for his stewardship and now they're quarrelling,' cut in Mrs. Elphinstone, all in one sweet stream. 'Why shouldn't Adelaide, on earth, if she wants to, Iveagh? Where is she, Wickford, and why has she not come down? I am sure I mentioned in heaps of letters she was to, and Sam also, as soon as I got here,—listen, now! I give the whole of you rendezvous by an oversight at the same hour this evening,—tea-time,—I shall have finished my sleep by then. Ernestine dearest, I'm asking the neighbourhood to tea, you don't mind it? I have a tropical trick'—turning back to the gentlemen—'of slacking in the—Iveagh, she likes you best!'

The last was a little flash, or snap, of jealousy, owing to certain amenities on the part of the beautiful Emer to her 'groom's' sly advances, while Mrs. Elphinstone's attention had been otherwise engaged.

'She's only flirtin',' said Wickford, having looked

that way for a period. 'Nothing in it, anyhow of a nature to last.'

'Well, if that's all she'll find the ground safer in your direction,' observed Lise. 'I'm only advising her——'

'Harder, you mean?' asked the Duke. Incorrigible, they were now playing above the dangerous subject, yet somehow harmlessly. Grace and goodwill, those two great qualities in humour saved them. Grace does not belong to the English, nor goodwill to the French wit always: M. du Frettay had a fine chance, really, of comparing the national shades.

'Mark's love to you, Wickford,' said Lise,—'well, is he not related?—and I was to thank your mother for endless obligations, in person, and my best clothes. I have some nowadays, though you might not think it.' (Lise, for a little beauty, had always been carelessly dressed.) 'Mark's so anxious I should do the right thing by all of you, and your mother foremost, naturally. I am here, as one might say, to represent him——'

'You look it,' said the brothers together.

'I am telling you the simple truth,' said Lise. 'Just let me know when I can wait on the Duchess, will you? I preserved that expression from a book I was reading on the ship. I'll use that of Wickford's mother when I get there, I said to meself, it becomes my station exactly——'

'Get *out* with you,—station!' said the Duke.

—'Being now a kind of poor dependant,' concluded Lise, preening herself in the sunshine, 'of your honourable house.'

'You could hardly be more dependant than the house is,' said Wickford. 'However, we'll get some

dinner for you the day you come up. The boy there has been shootin' rabbits——'

So they ran on, in great accord : and in league, too, for any keen eye that could observe it. Lise and Wickford, by common consent, were filling up time, playing to the gallery, with the strong consciousness of more serious drama in the rear. They were hand in hand, and eye to eye in understanding, a very pretty exhibition of friendship,—though it was perhaps fortunate Adelaide was not about. There are grades, Adelaide might have thought, to friendliness,—she and Wickford might not have agreed fully as to the grades. As for the Duchess—but then, Wickford would not have melted, had his mother been present, so that worked out all right.

' Well, this is over for the time being, I will not keep you,' said Mrs. Elphinstone graciously, when she had had enough of teasing Wick on the subject of Mark. ' You are both of you, surely, longing to be away. My wonderful,'—with sudden arms wreathing the mare again, ' you may say thank you to his younger lordship once, with propriety,—don't be led on by his artfulness to make too much of the obligation, which is nothing to speak of, to those really knowing his tastes. When we are alone together, Emer, you shall tell me about it,—the times you had,—the trouble you had with them wanting you, all of them,—too many of them—' Her wicked voice died away in the mare's mane. ' No, Iveagh,' she resumed with sudden energy. ' No, I am not dressed for it,—do be sensible a little,—look at my silk ! '

' It was not your habit to wear silk in the forenoon,' said the other brother, just behind her. ' That's to match Mark's moustache I shouldn't wonder,—up you go ! '

'That's all right,—good girl,' thought Mrs. Redgate : for again it was the Duke, ably ousting his brother, who had his hand beneath her little shoe. Between the two, Iveagh had not been able to touch her, to approach even for more than a moment : and now she sat her horse superbly, girl and horse silk-robed in the sunshine, a sight to heal sore eyes.

Wickford led Emer once across the gravel sweep, heedfully, one hand up to the rider, for Lise, Mark's or no, was a precious thing to be protected, and Emer was saddled for a man. Lise, for herself, took no pains : she leant to talk to him, chattering low, for the whole distance,—it was the chance for a little real confidence, before Adelaide came. Finally, her hand on his shoulder, she flew to the earth, and so turned back to the house, languor once more veiling her whole demeanour and gait. She passed Iveagh, standing solitary and neglected on the garden drive, without a word of farewell, nor even a smile to console him : and taking hold of Bess's arm, drew her away in the direction of the orchard, where her hammock was slung. Lise was behaving beautifully, no doubt of it : it was all very, very well done, that opening interview, on Lise's part. Only—well, how is it to be helped when young persons are made pictorial, and have practised making pictures of themselves and their surroundings all their life ?

'That is the most beautiful sight I ever saw,' said du Frettay, quite seriously, when it was over. 'Oh, Madame, Madame,—you are brave !'

'Do you think I am worse than brave ?' she asked, quickly for her. 'Go beyond it ?'

'It is wonderful daring,' said du Frettay. 'That is all I dare to say. You flash the fact of her right in his face, *hein* ?—and so blind him.'

‘ I do not at all wish to blind him,’ said Ernestine. ‘ Besides,’ she added, ‘ it is very hard to do.’

‘ Nevertheless, I think you have a great trust in truth,’ said du Frettay. ‘ In the whole truth, presented whole, not in parts of it. You think that is healthy for the mind.’

‘ Do I ? ’ she laughed. ‘ Go on.’

‘ I shall not go on,—you are not interested. You are far more interested,’ said Gabriel resentfully, ‘ in all that world of silly little persons, than in yourself.’

‘ I do like them,’ she admitted, ‘ they are so funny and troublesome. And their troubles,’ she added, flushing a very little, ‘ are more important than mine.’

‘ That is it,—that is it,’ he reflected. ‘ You think you are *rangée*, finished. How strange that is, here, for women still beautiful and young ! ’ A little later, the other admission of the speech struck him. ‘ You have troubles,’ he thought, ‘ troubles of your own,—I might have known it. I wonder what they are ? ’

Lise continued to behave beautifully. Of course, it was quite possible that at home, in private life, she always had. Her mother loved her passionately, and it was all Mrs. Fitzmaurice could do to spare her to Hatchways, even for a week. But the regular Hatchways club-contingent of young people had rarely, if ever, seen Miss Fitzmaurice at home, since her mother was delicate. They had seen her visiting, on the liberal terms *de rigueur* in the Suir community : and flirting, —each happy gentleman in private, and combined, in the *mêlée* : and hunting, mounted, vivid and wild as Diana let loose for the chase. Domestically, for all they knew,—for all Mark and Mrs. Fitzmaurice had

ever let them know,—she might be a pure star of prudence and decorum. Iveagh was quite sure she was.

Lise wrote to Mark every evening, sitting upright at Ernestine's desk. It was true, her eyes melted a little on her surroundings while she told him things, but she told him—her world was assured—the 'simple truth.' She practised her music, fitfully; then, obeying no doubt some bidding in her atmosphere, she conceived a warm admiration for Bess. Lise had never met Bess in the life, though she had heard about her from the Suir boys, who implied 'the girl' was all a girl should be. Lise agreed with the Suir boys: she cultivated Bess, and drew her from obscurity. She thought her drawings wonderful, clever beyond praise: she was impatient with Ernestine and du Fretay for not admiring them more. She chased Bess, haunted her, wooed her, sued for her affection. She was ready, in the cause of Bess, to take three kittens on her lap at once.

Not that this last was any sacrifice to Lise: a kitten herself, she enjoyed them. She let the irrepressible Pickle, aspiring to her shoulder, make a ladder of her silken skirts. She agitated an absent finger, while conversing, in the right, the only way: the movement which first stiffens an attentive kitten, then causes its head to wave slightly as it focusses, then illumines the focussed eyes to a haggard glare: lastly, provokes a terrific onslaught on the finger to slay it, to finish it, to eat it up. At this awful juncture Lise, instead of abstracting her pretty white finger (which is unwise) let it lie dead in her lap, quite dead, suppliant, appealing. Whereupon the savage onslaught grows dubious, grows slack, grows silly, the eyes question, the sharp

teeth enter not,—and the whole drama ends with the tender and tentative licking of the finger by a small rough tongue.

Such are cat-manners, strange and delicate, which Lise knew by instinct and imitation, and Bess by love and study. Unquestionably, such knowledge is a bond. Certainly, those two Elizabeths should have joined forces over it. Yet, persistently, Bess was shy of Lise.

Lise, observing it, chased her shyness. 'Why are you on your manners with me?' she asked, in her careless little captivating fashion. 'Ye' she said faintly for the you,—as Iveagh did,—as Wickford did sometimes. Bess's heart, having nothing else to feed on for the moment, fed on the way she spoke.

Bess could not answer the question, though, and Ernestine would not. Ernestine said Bess was always shy. 'Yes, but why with *me*?' said Lise. She asked, little by little, in the manner that proved she guessed.

She approached Rick, flattering and cajoling, but Uncle Rick was very careful. He hinted that the Rye-born family, in general, was a little stiff,—in the sense of straight, straight-backed. In a wonderfully unassuming fashion, it held its head up. You might almost call it pride, or dignity. Look at Ernestine!

Mrs. Elphinstone looked, having never, like most people, much thought of looking before. And she saw, of course, the family resemblance,—Mr. Redgate was right. And she had, by so looking, some slight, slow illumination upon Bess.

'Where do they come from, really?' she asked him in confidence.

'What do you mean by *really*?' said Rick, who, being a *Times* critic, picked at words.

Lise meant the Duchess, of course, by *really*. The

Duchess having been, on one 'occasion, annoyed with her dear Ernestine in Lise's company, had aired the Manchester charge. The Duchess had an idea, that day, that the Ryeborn people had their origins there, or thereabouts. She was not convinced (Ernestine had annoyed her so) that cotton-mills and so on were not at the back of it. Or linen-mills, which is worse, because it contains a soupçon of Mr. Ruskin, and his gentlemanly but rather trying ideas.

Lise explained that the Duchess was what her 'really' meant. She was very tactful and comical over the Duchess, so Rick's literary horns lay down.

'They're a Northern lot, my wife's,' said Rick. 'You've only to see 'em tackle a Midland gang, to be sure of that.'

'I saw so well, when she talked to Sir Giles,' said Lise. Rick's literary snail-horns retreated almost.

'Stuffy,' said Rick, 'the Midland people are. Not a breeze about 'em.'

'Quite windless,' said Lise. 'But Mark——'

'Oh, the Captain's a man o' parts,' said Rick, pleasantly. 'Brains, in any feller, makes all the breeze necessary.'

'Dear Mark,' said Lise, as was correct. She clasped her little hands on her skirt,—or rather on the kitten that lay there.

'Then you think Miss Ryeborn is too proud to talk to me,' she said softly.

'I never said that,' parried Rick. 'Bess'll make friends, right enough, if you leave her a little time. You must give 'em rope, if you understand me: not follow too close.'

'I love independence,' said Lise. So she did, for herself. She did not love independence of her, though:

and she barely understood it, except on one theory that was growing in her daily.

When she left him alone, the master of Hatchways looked before him, for some time, in meditation. Then he said—'Clever little puss,'—lifted his brows, and took off his spectacles. Then he said—'Fancy me explaining her,'—and laughed.

He was not thinking of Bess, though : he was thinking of Ernestine. Life, since he had known the Ryeborns first, flashed before him, as he formulated for Lise's information that simple phrase—'Not follow too close.'

XIII

LISE WAITS ON THE DUCHESS

LISE went on behaving beautifully.

She waited on the Duchess, up at the House. Dressed in her best clothes, much advertised beforehand to her former playmates, she prepared an assault on the staid Victorian portals of Holmer, there to assume her new 'station' towards the Wickford family, owing to Mark. She was to go alone, Mrs. Mark Elphinstone in her own right,—most entertaining. Three gentlemen at starting offered their escort, but Lise proudly rejected them all.

'Will I do?' said Lise, entering carelessly upon lots of people in the Hatchways drawing-room, at the usual reception-hour, four o'clock. It happened to be rather a selected day,—two Justices of the Peace were present, not to mention a pillar of the Church. The pink china replaced the blue dragons on the silver tray, Bess's daffodils were grouped about, and the western sunshine flashing over all.

'How nice you all look,' said Lise, with truth. 'How are ye, Canon Oxborough? How do ye do, Sir Giles? Wickford, what are you here for? I'm just about to wait on you, up at the House.'

There was protest, naturally: Wickford and others said things,—quite inadequate. There was nothing at all adequate for man to say. Lise was dressed in what

she called 'satiny velvet,' of a dull olive shade. She had lace ruffles, and long feathers, and little pearls in her little ears, and goodness knows what that was distracting. Canon Oxborough, who possessed what other Oxboroughs called the 'gift of the gab,' to wit a pleasant social manner, remarked that Mrs. Elphinstone, in so approaching his sister, was taking an unfair advantage.

'I need all me advantages,' said Lise, looking ravishing. 'I'm going on business, for my husband and others. I'm as frightened as possible. Take that cat off me, Wickford, would you mind?'

'Like me to hold on to?' asked Wickford, removing the Pickle, like a burr, from her satiny skirts. Two other persons offered their services, as has been said. She really looked, as she stood before them, too fragile and fine for business offices: and anyhow, it seemed absurd for Lise to be alone.

'Have some tea before you go,' said Bess behind.

'No,' said Lise, turning that way, 'I do not regard it as polite to the Duchess. I must suppose her tea's at least as good as yours.'

'But you know it is not,' reasoned the Duke.

'That makes no difference to politeness,' retorted Lise. 'Whenever did politeness and the truth take hands? I've learnt manners, I may mention, since you saw me.'

Still, lightly as she spoke, she eyed the pink tea-cups and the steaming kettle wistfully. She felt sleepy,—tired: she longed to be told by Ernestine or somebody authoritative that she might stay. Yet the Duchess had signified by her son that she would be at home to-day: Ernestine, engaged with Mr. Courtier, who was honouring her by his half-yearly visit, gave

no lead : duty was duty, and Mark was Mark. So Lise shook off those who would have detained her, the Pickle included, and made her way mournfully to the door. Canon Oxborough, getting there before his brother with clerical cunning, opened it and claimed a visit at his Canonry, simultaneously.

'Come and see my primulas,' minced the Canon : that is, Giles who attended called it mincing. Giles hated Lionel, at the moment. Primulas, indeed !

Lise went on behaving beautifully.

At the Holmer entrance, near by the lodge, she met M. du Frettay emerging. He was dressed as for riding, but without a horse. Well, then, the case was clear : he had been riding one of Wickford's horses, had left his mount at the Holmer stable, and was now going back to Hatchways to tea. He was late for tea, but being French he took it unconcernedly. He might not even be aware of it, since he had been in the company, most probably, of Iveagh, who judged hours out-of-doors, if he judged them at all, by the sun.

'Madame !' said M. du Frettay, sweeping off his hat in an agreeably excessive manner, and bringing his heels together. 'Toute seule !' Lise smiled at M. du Frettay, and stopped in the road.

'I'm waiting on the Duchess,' she explained. 'I'm getting frightened a little. Walk with me up to the door.'

M. du Frettay swung on his heel immediately. And this though he had been making for refreshment, after riding ! A nice, self-denying foreign man.

'I'll not take you further,' said Lise consolingly. 'It's only the sight of these black trees rather put me out. Once through them it's better, isn't it ?'

'The worst is over,' Gabriel agreed. They entered, and passed the Lodge.

'I was just wondering if I could manage it, when you met me,' said Lise. 'So dark they are and daunting. Often I've wondered Wick doesn't cut them down.'

Gabriel agreed again, heedlessly. Cut them down! Irreverent aliens! Cut down Holmer Avenue, fit entrance to its sacred haunts! What is a residence without an Avenue, anyhow?

'It's useful in a rainstorm, of course,' said Lise, looking up at the trees. 'The times I've ridden under them wringing wet after a long day. There is one thing about Holmer, they dry you. Big fires and so on, they dry you thoroughly well. I kept a complete change of linen here,' said Lise, pensively, 'and so did Adelaide. It was Wickford advised us to do so, in case of catching cold.'

'They are hospitable,' said M. du Fretay demurely, but his eyes were dancing. However, he was far too genuinely gallant to take advantage of such innocent confidences.

'It seems to me wanting in features,' he said, criticising the Holmer property. 'Perhaps I mean personality.'

'I expect you do,' said Lise. 'The features are there all right. I'm surprised at you, M. du Fretay. Have you never stood upon the Rustic Bridge? Have you seen the Shrubberies, and the Prospect? Has Wickford shown you the Belvedere?'

'I have not seen the Belvedere,' admitted Gabriel.

'Then you'll have to,—I'll tell Ernestine. The first fine day there is we'll go over *en masse* and look at it. It's a good step from here, off that way, the other side

of their land. It's placed on a hill, and faces the best view here, for miles round. You look away eastward across the counties, and across England, and Mr. Marchant says across Europe to the Ural Mountains, but I'm not believing the stories he tells. Anyhow it's all blue and wonderful where the sky gets mixed with the land. I expect you know the kind of view I mean.'

'We saw the kind several times to-day,' said Gabriel. 'You describe it perfectly. But the Belvedere, Madame,—for mercy's sake, why the name?'

'I've not the least idea,' said Lise. 'Nor Wickford, because I asked him. Why the Prospect, if you come to that. There's no prospect in it but a pair of seedy yew-trees. The Belvedere's made of plaster, chiefly, and half-peeled. It has little dolly pillars you could pull down with one hand. Iveagh says he will some night,—they both hate it like poison. And who wonders, with a view like that to shame it? It has what's the three-cornered thing on Italian temples pretending to be Greek; and instead of letting ill alone, they have scraped an improving saying on it out of Wordsworth,—and the Wickford arms.'

'Oh, oh!' protested Gabriel. 'Not both, Madame. You exaggerate.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Lise, with a charming giggle. 'You wait and see. There!'—They came out of the Avenue. 'Now it feels better, you can go back if you like. . . . Who's that in front of us,—the school-mistress? Now what's Renie Allgood mean by going to see the Duchess the day I call?'

'I can only be sure,' said Gabriel, 'that Miss Irene Allgood has an excellent object,—as much as the Duchess in receiving her.'

'But so have I an object,' asserted Lise. 'Here I

am doing the correct thing by my husband in coming, as I take it,—and keeping the peace.'

'What,' said Gabriel, 'is the peace in danger?'

'You know it is! Don't go pretending. And, by the same token,' said Lise, with an air of discovery, 'you might give me your ideas. Listen now,—if you want to take years from my age——'

'I do not,' said Gabriel, having calculated.

'Now be serious, because I am,' entreated Lise. 'I really need to know this before I go in. Of course, I notice Lady Wick's fallen out with Ernestine. Now what I want to know——'

'*De grâce*, let me off,' he said, turning graver.

'I will not, because I am sure you know it. Is there anything,' said Lise, 'between Wickford and that girl?'

'Miss Bess? I have reason,' said Gabriel, after an interval, 'to believe there is not.'

'Good. Is there anything between her and Iveagh?'

'I am not certain perfectly,' said Gabriel, after another interval, 'of the sense of your expression. But I believe there is not.'

Lise was silent, satisfied. She had her answer. She was a woman, so she was not going to summon a man, however foreign and ingenious, to declare that 'the girl' was in love with his own friend, unrequited: but that was what he meant, she was sure. If for no other reason, that he was even quicker in the uptake than she was; and she had already scented the fact.

Still behaving beautifully, Lise arrived at the door of Holmer mansion, and stood upon the steps; and still M. du Frettay followed, quiet and courtly, seeing her safe.

'I'm frightened,' she told him briefly again : and it struck him, as a fact, she was. The Duchess, to girls, was frightening : she always had been so, in the past : and Lise, aged twenty-two, felt a girl again on her premises. Her little pulses were beating fast, audible in the gloomy silence, while they stood waiting for the last barrier to fall.

'Enter the seneschal,' said Lise, as steps were heard. 'It's like a tale of Scott's ! I know the man Michael well, but I dursn't look at him. Oh dear !' The door opened. 'Is the Duchess at home ?' said Lise, very grand.

Her Grace was, madam.

'You can go now,' murmured Lise. 'You want food, and she gives you nothing to speak of.' But she looked pale, to du Fretay's eyes, and he followed her on.

They crossed the stodgy hall, and passed the frightful staircase to the door of the drawing-room, which cracked as the man opened it to admit them. It would be necessary to ask such as Ernestine why some doors crack,—excessive varnish in the past, probably. Holmer House, for want of a single graceful line, was varnished from top to toe. It smelt of it, for all the Duchess could do. Most of the woodwork was reddish, perhaps mahogany. We have referred before to the chimney-marble. We refrain from reference to the plaster-moulding, grates, or the handles of the doors.

The only chance was arson, as Iveagh said.

'Ugh, what a place !' moaned little Lise, in to herself. 'Iveagh, I want you.' Aloud she said—'This was the room where I met my husband first. It's funny to think of it, wanting him.'

Gabriel debated that 'wanting.' Which language was it, and what did it stand for ? There are so many possible shades of meaning to the word.

'That's Iveagh's father,' said Lise, walking across the room. She did not say Wickford's. 'He was a wonderful speaker, my husband says,—persuasive. He's the orator's mouth, wouldn't you say? And such sad eyes.'

'Curious his sons have not inherited it,' said du Frettay, looking hard at the portrait's eyes, which gloomed a little, as Lise said. Sulky, almost,—the greatest wit of his generation.

'There's not much likeness to either of them either,' he said.

'He was a handsomer man.' Lise changed place again, restlessly, to the window, whence one gazed upon the terrace and the Shrubbery, a trifle less uninviting than the room. 'Mark says he was wonderful with Iveagh, managing him in his little tantrums when no one could. Mark remembers more than Wickford even, he's older. He's told me lots and lots about the early days. Once the Secretary of State came in for a kind of confabulation,—and there was little Iveagh, asleep in the Duke's big chair. Six he was,—he'd had a bad day of it,—nurses, his mother at her wits' end, Wick worried and Mark shocked.'

'Shocked?' asked Gabriel.

'Naturally. Mark had never seen such things,—it was his first visit. He can't ever understand Iveagh anyhow. Of course he tries.'

Odd, thought du Frettay, her little head was so full of Iveagh. Was it merely the contrast with the varnish and stodgery, or some other inward debate?

'Now you can go,' said Lise, turning rather abruptly to face him. 'You don't like calling in riding-clothes anyhow. It's a shame to be treating you like Mark.'

'Is that how you treat him?' ventured Gabriel.

‘Mark,’ said Lise, ‘can’t stand doing anything in the wrong clothes. It’s a weakness of his,—the only one. Sometimes I catch him out, for the fun of it, and he hates it. You’re hating it now,—don’t tell me,—but you’re too polite to say so. Go back while you can, M. du Frettay,—yes, I wish it.’ She stamped her foot. ‘You’re tired, really, and Ernestine will see to you best. Go quick now, while you have time.’

M. du Frettay went. He had been in serious danger for twenty minutes past of losing his head, not to say heart, in this company. So he went, as directed,—while he had time.

The door cracked, as it closed behind him ; Lise was left alone. She sat down on the piano-stool, yawned a little, and rested her elbow on the closed keyboard.

‘I want me tea,’ she observed, to the walls of the drawing-room. She really did. She was too tired to bear solitude. Du Frettay had helped things along nicely while he lasted ; now by her own choice she had dismissed him, and felt the gap the more.

‘Isn’t the woman in, after all ? And why on earth does he not tell me so ?’

Thus soliloquised Lise, in the direction of the Duke’s portrait. She had an idea he was sympathising, granted a lovely lady in satiny-velvet clothes, in his own reception-room. Deserted, during her state visit to his halls,—surely, he could not approve of it !

Suddenly Lise, having half-opened the piano-lid, closed it again softly. She had an idea.

‘Where’s that girl ?’ she said, aloud as before.

The idea of the girl,—Miss Irene Allgood, certificated Froebel instructress of youth, filled her thoughts completely. It poured in, ousting everybody, Mark

and Iveagh included. Where, indeed, *was* that girl, who had been on the steps of Holmer just before her? Why, granted the Duchess delayed or not at home, was *she* not waiting too?

Slowly, as she sat at the piano, looking before her, the blood of the Fitzmaurices mounted to Lise's pretty sallow cheek. Her eyes sparkled, her back straightened, her hand dropped from the piano's closed keys. What? . . . Almost in the same instant, steps were heard.

The door cracked, and Michael entered, looking very grave.

'Her Grace is sorry she is detained, madam,' rehearsed Michael formally. 'Business of some importance. Her Grace wonders, with her excuses, if you would care to show Mr. du Frettay the Shrubberies, for twenty minutes to half an hour, while you wait.'

Michael himself added the excuses, being an Irish gentleman. His mistress, as a fact, had sent no excuses to the girl at all.

Twenty minutes to half an hour! The idea of it! Renie in front of her, openly preferred to her,—to herself, Mark's wife, come against the grain in his interest,—her very first call as his bride! Treated like a girl, a common girl, to be snubbed, swept aside, forgotten——

'I'll pay her out!' thought Lise immediately.

Slowly, during the portentous pause, her eyes on the footman altered. She had known him once—some time before—they had been acquainted.

'M. du Frettay is gone, as you see, Michael,' she said.

Michael saw it, sorrowfully. Slowly, during the next silence, he recognised Miss Lise.

'Is it a tadpole escaped?' said Lise suddenly.

Michael believed not. Miss Allgood had not told

him, but he had an idea it was some matter of the children's games. Games! Of course, if Lise had studied with Froebel, she would have known the profound historic significance and moral value of games. But she was not Froebelian, nor Germanic in any sense.

During the next interval, she seemed to be feeling for a card. She sought it, could not find it at once, thinking of other things. . . .

'Lord Iveagh might be there,' mentioned Michael hopefully. 'He was round at the back, a minute since, with Mr. Sam.'

'I would not want to disturb them,' said Mrs. Elphinstone; but her eyes were melting and shadowing, and the card still eluded her search.

'I'd not wonder if they was in, by now,' said Michael, gaining courage, 'in his Grace's room. Unless Mr. Sam had gone.'

'I'd not wish to trouble him, in any case,' said Lise, wearily. She left the card. 'No, Michael, I'm a little tired. I will wait here.'

The door cracked behind Michael departing,—sure of his mission now. Ireland for ever! Lise, on the piano-stool, smiled across at the Duke's portrait.

'Serve her right,' she said suggestively. After all, had he not known the Duchess,—well? Better than anybody?

Lise had stopped behaving beautifully. She gave herself a rest. She opened the Duchess's piano, considering that her station in that household entitled her to it. If it did not, she did not care. . . . She began to play the 'White Rocks,' quietly. Now, the 'White Rocks' was the elfin air from the far west, which had first led Iveagh astray.

XIV

SEQUEL TO THE FOREGOING

THAT which had passed between Iveagh and Sam since Adelaide's public baiting of him would be difficult, indeed impossible, for an ordinary pen to state. A constant exchange, a shifting as it were of the ground of understanding, of the terms of their acquaintance, had taken place ; great sensitiveness sacrificed, thrown into the pool, as it were, on Iveagh's side, an unheard-of effort of comprehension offered up by Mr. Coverack, before things between them could be at all straight again. But the bond held, triumphant, unshaken, and the return to absolutely ordinary conditions was celebrated, this day, by a solemn feast after riding in Wickford's room.

The end of it all was, a kind of compact : no terms exactly stated, but all understood. As follows : Sam would keep Iveagh's counsel, and do his best for him, in the matter of Lise, whatever it was Iveagh really wanted : Iveagh would, on his part, forbear to let the Duchess know certain little passages, in recent times, between Adelaide and Sam.

The last was highly important, as Iveagh recognised. He granted without a pang that Sam, whom Addy had always attracted, should still sheepishly cleave to her, in spite of her treatment of him :—because he knew what women are. He bore no grudge to Sam for

it whatever,—though of course he bade him, duty-bound, look out for Wick. He also gave up, though more regretfully, the possible weapon against his mother that Adelaide's double game, flirting with Samuel, presented.

All this really complicated business had been concluded, needless to say, without the use of either of the ladies' names. Lise had long been too dear to Iveagh, and Adelaide was rapidly becoming too interesting to Sam, for names to be at all in request. The pronouns she and her, in each case, sufficed the bargainers. Each supplied the other's favourite female name, with ease.

That Wickford would not have liked a feast in his room, goes without saying. All the dogs were there, and he always tried to keep his ducal and literary sanctum clear of Iveagh, Sam, and the dogs. Any one member of the fraternity separately Wickford could do with,—so he patiently explained to them,—not the lot. Iveagh alone, Sam alone, Fricka the wolf-hound, George the dachs, or Pat the terrier alone respectively, were harmless and tolerable. They were even consoling to ducal and literary solitude at times. But he really could not bear the whole Comus-rout of them, Sam's horrid tobacco in the curtains, and crumbs all over his dearest papers and books. Wick had made his room respectable by the Oxford standards,—not by the Oxborough ones. He had a nice velvet carpet, walnut fittings, and Mrs. Redgate (secretly) had ordered the covering of his chairs. Was it likely he wanted Pat, fresh from a rat-hunt and brown with mud, curled in one of them? Why, the Irish Secretary might be sitting there to-morrow! He really thought Iveagh might understand.

Iveagh did, intermittently. He had a real regard for his brother as chieftain of the Suirs at times. But the day of the pact was an exception,—for one thing, Wick was safely away. He was down at Mrs. Redgate's, behaving nicely, and seeing to Iveagh's uncles. His room was thus, being empty, at others' service: to the true Suir nature, the mere fact of its emptiness proved that. Iveagh and Sam, albeit intensely curious, avoided reading Wick's book, sheets of which lay spread on the table, because, before a book is printed or a speech heard, no gentleman does such things. They did not avoid, having laid it aside, setting a black kettle temporarily where it had lain; nor did their gentlemanly instincts discourage George, who was always learning tricks which he never mastered, from nosing wet morsels of much-begged cake about the velvet floor. Such trifles they overlooked, in a crisis of friendship and festivity: and Sam paid the finest tribute possible to Wickford's chairs by using two of them—for self and boots.

This was the intimate occasion which the footman, fresh from Lise in the drawing-room, interrupted. The occasion had just got going, when Michael came. He stated the case, as he knew he could to Iveagh, quite clearly. Mrs. Elphinstone was in the back drawing-room, come to visit her Grace. Her Grace happened to be engaged with Miss Allgood about the children's games. She would likely not go to Miss Lise for the matter of half an hour. Miss Lise wished no one disturbed, particularly. She was playing there on the piano to pass the time. She had walked up,—he thought she seemed tired——

It was sufficient,—more than enough. Both young men were on their feet, Iveagh speechless and pale with rage.

‘Half an hour?’ gaped Sam, who was also Lise’s old companion. ‘Well, that’s a queer thing, now! Who’s Miss Allgood?’

Iveagh said something about Miss Allgood which had far better not be repeated. It was not even true, for she was a young lady with nothing against her, in life, a hard student, and what is more, she had often weary work with the Duchess. It is probable she was more to be pitied than blamed on this occasion: only Lise’s party was not in a state to regard such arguments, naturally.

‘I’ll see to it,’ said Iveagh briefly to the messenger. ‘Let you fetch some more cream and so on,—Fricka’s drunk it,—I’ll see to the rest.’

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Michael softly, slipped out, and shut the door cautiously behind him. He already had some idea, owing to natural sympathy and an intense interest in his betters’ concerns, that caution in the case was necessary. Beyond that Iveagh’s commands, however casual, secured attention, and his use of the verb ‘let’ was individual,—it simply had to be obeyed. Anyhow, the Irish servants respected him a good deal more than Wickford: secretly, their first service was his. Why, it would be hard to say, unless that Wickford, at times, adopted his mother’s kind condescension towards them, studying their tastes. Iveagh could be a horrid tyrant,—always had been capable of it from childhood. The real regard of Michael and his kind for Iveagh dated back to the period when his royal rages, now and again, stirred the house pleurably from top to bottom: at top and bottom, rather,—since the Duke and his back-kitchen enjoyed it, and the Duchess and her well-trained staff did not. We refer the curious to M. du Frettay’s profound observations on

types of aristocracy, as exhibited in our islands, for further light.

‘Shall I go?’ growled Sam, much concerned to stick by the terms of the celebrated bargain, whatever they were.

‘No, you will not,’ said Iveagh evenly. ‘You’ll sit there, and take your feet off the chair, and behave as well as ever you can, till I tell you. She’s Mark’s wife, I’ll ask you to remember, and fond of him, and she’s used to having things nice, anyhow at Mrs. Redgate’s,—*and* she is not well.’

‘Lord,’ thought Sam, ‘what a freak you are,’—but he followed orders.

‘Take that tea-pot out of the fender,’ said Iveagh, ‘and put it where it ought to be, and get some of the crumbs away, and put Wick’s writin’ things straight on the table, and his book lyin’ open an’ easy, just where it was.’

‘What’s that for?’ Sam asked, puzzled by this last direction. However, Iveagh was quite sure about it. It made things altogether shades more respectable and honourable to have Wick’s statistical book.

‘And open the window,’ he resumed instructions, ‘and finish your pipe there if you have to, and turn the dogs out,—barring Fricka who I hope’s to be trusted,’—he looked at Fricka, who gently whined,—‘and generally see things decent,’ finished Iveagh, ‘till I come back.’

So instructed, Sam was left to digest his strange position: and Iveagh repaired to the back drawing-room, whence the ‘White Rocks’ was dimly stealing, a passion of outraged love and hospitality flooding his soul: a Suir passion of purest enmity to Froebel and Oxborough and their attendant or mutual usefulness.

Usefulness!—with Beauty deserted in the drawing-room, green-suited by the fairies to delight them, and needing her tea! Lise had not appealed to the spirit of the great Duke's picture in vain.

Lise danced home to Hatchways that night in the highest spirits, all her weariness miraculously done away. Her reception by the Wickford family, she gave the company to understand, had been a lordly one,—as indeed it had. Oh yes, she had had lots to eat,—oh yes, the entertainment had been adequate. Why, was not the Duchess herself entertainment sufficiently? It was nice, Lise implied, to feel one had done one's duty by the Duchess,—whether one's duty by Mark she did not say.

'I hope her Graciousness did not keep you waiting?' said M. du Frettag, who never—because he did not care—got titles right.

'I hardly noticed it,' said Lise. 'I was playing on the piano when she came in. . . . By the way, Ernestine, I quite like Renie Allgood. She isn't half a bad little sort of girl.'

'Ah,' said Gabriel, remembering. 'She made one of you.'

'She came in when the Duchess did,' said Lise. That some forty minutes had intervened she did not say. 'Renie's a plain-faced girl and puts it on, but she's well-meaning. There was some question of the revival of old games they were talking of, over the tea. I saw no harm at all in it, from what I heard.'

'Did you hear any harm from what you saw?' said Mr. Redgate, picking at words as usual.

'I am glad you sympathised in that, Lise,' said Ernes-

tine. 'Gertrude is so glad to get musical people's support.' Ernestine, of course, knew from Adelaide that the games matter was Gertrude's 'latest,'—subsequent to the sand even,—quite the newest of all.

'She seemed pleased about it,' said Lise gaily. 'I called her Aunt Gertrude for Mark's sake and she took it well. Then I played some of the little tunes, and Renie sang baby-words to them,—she's quite a good little voice. I can't see why Iveagh should be rude to her——'

'Hullo,' said Rick, 'was Iveagh there?'

'He and Sam joined on to us,' said Lise, 'when they heard the music. It was quite a little concert we had. You can always get Iveagh with music,—he's really very fond of it,—I often tell my husband——'

'Oh, Lise, Lise,—mischief, what have you been up to?' sighed Mrs. Redgate in spirit: but she spoke no word.

The next days were adventurous and interesting, Lise being engaged in waiting for the Indian mail.

She was also feeling better for the home air of Hatchways, daily less languid, and more inclined to try her powers. She wished Mark would write, of course, but in the interval she sat for her portrait to Miss Ryeborn, out of doors since the weather was agreeable, during the morning hours. Bess had been afraid that sitting would bore her, but—dear, no, Lise was not dull! M. du Fretay, for instance, slaving at his aeronautic calculations in the study, took a stroll at least once during the morning, to cool his brain, and see how the orchard sitting was getting on. The Duke, going up to London dutifully every day, called in for an orchard interlude on his way to the station. Mr. Redgate was

not too immersed in articles to bend above his niece's easel, and chaff the model, at times. Iveagh was there, quite as often as anybody wanted. He lay reading in the grass unnoticed, and saying no word.

'Now look here, Lise,' said the Duke, during a pause in Mrs. Elphinstone's selfless labours, one fine morning. 'It's no earthly use going on like this.'

Wickford had captured her, as usual, on his road to London, while Bess rested, and while Bess's model, immensely pleased with self and circumstances, ate a bun. There is nothing so exhausting to nature, it is well known, as sitting for one's portrait, and her appetite was improving: Lise bit her bun with the greatest goodwill, as she strolled with the Duke—a pleasant change—down the flowery path that leads to the beehives.

'Like what?' said Lise, lifting her eyebrows.

'You'll make him as bad as ever,' said Wickford. 'We shall have it all over again.'

'I haven't the pleasure of understanding you, Duke,' said Lise.

'Oh yes, you have. There are—limits, you know. We've had bother enough. You know perfectly.'

Lise knew, of course; but she did not see why Wick should treat her like this about it. Wick really had an exceptionally unadorned way of putting things. M. du Fretay, now, would have turned an observation like that quite nicely, so that one need feel no faintest nudging of remorse. Lise determined to be chilly with Wickford at once, even though it should be at the bun's expense.

But it was no use. Wickford took the line of the old companion, and argued unfluently in that tone. Lise had to give in at last.

'Well,' she said, with a naughty glint, 'what do you want me to do?'

'I want you not to do,' said Wickford curtly.

'But I'm not doing anything.' She looked subtle, liquid, in her manner: and innocent as the air.

'Give Miss Ryeborn a chance,' blurted Wickford.

'Oh, Wick!' Multitudinous, ethereal reproach, from every quarter of the woman's heaven, fell upon the blunderer. He flushed up, but stuck to it.

'I mean it. That's the least you can do.'

'You talk as if I'd done wrong,' said Lise.

There was an interval, Wickford perplexed. He wished to be just, of course. If Lise had, as she implied, merely existed, breathed the air in his brother's neighbourhood. . . . It is rottenly hard to know, with these girls!

He looked at her. He had often looked at Lise, in the old days. She was looking sidelong across him, and it struck him she resembled a fawn. Something in the setting of her eyes,—the corners of them.

'Can't you play about with the Frenchman, if you need to?'

'*Wick!*'

Useless: she had to look straight at last, and met his eyes. Nice, honest eyes he had, with just the right expression. Wickford understood coquetry by nature, made every allowance, that was the fact. Lise knew he did because—well, they had tried some passages in the past. Adelaide's fault entirely. He was tackling her now, with hopeless unreadiness of expression, but in just the right vein. He held her, loosely and firmly as he held his horse.

'Are you going to beg my pardon?' said Mrs. Elphinstone.

‘ Not just yet.’

‘ You needn’t think I’m going to make bargains about a thing like that,’ said Lise.

‘ I don’t,’ said Wickford. ‘ I want you to think it out.’

‘ What ? ’

‘ Think it out,’ said Wickford.

‘ Well, I’m sure ! ’ said Lise to her surroundings, which were the beehives. They had arrived there.

She attended to her bun all the way back to the orchard,—exclusively, making up for lost time. Wickford wheeled station-ward, when they reached the orchard-turn. She took no notice of him when he left.

XV

CAPTURE OF LISE

I

SIR GEORGE came down to Holmer for the week-end in order to (as his mother put it) see about Iveagh: and of course, though knowing his profound dislike for it, the Duchess gave a party for him.

The Duchess could not avoid the conviction that it was good for George. She was the more convinced of it that Mrs. Redgate made, in spite of their recent estrangement, an attempt to dissuade her. Wickford, it seemed, had seen a note from Sir George to Mrs. Redgate, in which he was 'hoping to be able to see his friends and talk to the boys on the quiet, this time,' and other hints that equally well conveyed his state of mind. It was his usual state, shy and retiring, faithful to the friends he cared for, and reckless of chatter and renown. Wickford, too evidently urged by Ernestine, tried to put a spoke in his mother's hospitable wheel: and his efforts to discourage her had their invariable stimulating effect.

Shaking off her eldest-born,—a strictly maternal attitude,—the Duchess went ahead with her arrangements. She planned a little dinner of a dozen, on Saturday. She invited, for George's sake and to silence Wickford, Dr. Ashwin of Harley Street, one of George's oldest friends,—who refused. Well, there you were,—

one could do no more than ask the man. She proceeded to ask a Bishop, because Bishops in the nature of things take to explorers,—at least they ought. Disseminating the true faith, first the ploughshare and then the seed,—she explained it to Gabriel du Frettay, who seemed sceptical. She chose a Bishop who had been attached to Wickford's school a dozen years back, and addressed him as 'my boy.' The Duchess was always doing things of this sort, and then being surprised her sons were sulky. She invited Gabriel, because he knew how to behave, not because George had known his father. She did not invite Mr. Marchant because, she told Wickford, he was not good enough. Vulgarities of this sort one may allow oneself in a strictly domestic circle. These, with her sons and brother Giles—Oliver had gone at last—made six men.

The question of women to match was more troublesome,—one had to pick and choose. The Duchess picked her sister-in-law, who had been trying for ages, by any means, to entrap Sir George. That George had been trying, all he knew, to avoid Isabel, made no difference,—now they would have to meet. She proceeded to pick Adelaide's mother, with whom Isabel had never been able to get on: there was pronounced hostility between the ladies. This, with dear Adelaide (for Wickford's sake) and herself, made four.

Two places were vacant. She turned over Lise. She turned, re-turned, and adopted her, without an idea that in so turning Lise she was turning herself. Yet it was so. Lise, the naughty sprite, had captured the Duchess: she assumed and held her station at Holmer in spite of all. And how? Hastily,—before the whole of our intelligent public forestall us,—let us explain.

First then, Lise herself had done most towards the miracle, by her friendly interest in Miss Allgood's activities, and her dainty fashion of playing the little tunes. Pardon and favour crept towards Lise on that occasion, and that in spite of the fact that the Duchess's son, under her eyes, was attracted as much as she was. It was still annoying about Iveagh, of course, but somehow, Renie and the games stood first. So many things had always been able to oust Iveagh, as they took root and flourished in his mother's active mind. The question of Wickford could at any moment obscure him, the question of any of the Duchess's 'causes' could: the school, of course,—games could rout him, he could be partially buried in sand. Last of all Mark, the distant, omnipotent Mark, outweighed Iveagh utterly, as he outweighed Wickford also at need; and Mark, since the occasion of Lise's call, had written to his patroness.

Mark confided his little wife to her, that was what it came to. It was belated, like all things out of India, having been an afterthought, when Lise had left. It was sedate, collected, like Mark: but he was none the less worrying, dreaming over Lise in every line of it: he was none the less secure in his assumption of his Aunt Gertrude's motherly interest in her, for his sake; and his Aunt Gertrude, so far as she was capable of it, felt ashamed.

That and the games together, and perhaps Lise's own gentleness and gaiety,—though satiny-velvet fripperies went for naught,—was enough to unbend her original attitude. She unbent faintly to Mrs. Redgate too; only faintly, for we regret to say, as soon as she really wanted Lise, she became jealous of Hatchways for owning her: which was highly un-

dignified and illogical, but none the less Oxborough for that.

There remained a place for a girl at her table on Saturday, which her sons assumed (for some reason) Miss Ryeborn was to occupy. Her elder son let her know he assumed it,—and the Duchess set her teeth.

‘Gertrude wants you for the week-end, Lise,’ said Ernestine. ‘I think you will have to go.’

‘Oh, I don’t want to, Ernestine,’ said Lise, burying her cinder-coloured head in Mrs. Redgate’s lap. ‘I don’t want to,—I dislike it. Are you all tired of me so soon?’

They were not all tired of her at Hatchways, they liked her dearly. Even Bess could not avoid it, though Bess’s life, moved quietly into the background to make room for Lise, was turning very grey. She was studying Lise, for her soul’s good, daily. It may have been the kitten-aspect, but she had made rather a wonderful little portrait, and it was nearly done. Wickford, who watched its progress, declared his intention of showing it to his mother, and getting her to buy it as a present for Mark. And if she did not, said Wickford, he would do so. Mark, when the worst was said, deserved something, for granting them the light of Lise.

‘Find me an excuse, then,’ said Lise to everybody. ‘I’m not well particularly,—how’s that?’ Ernestine shook her head for all answer. ‘Well then, the painting,—fixing one of the company. ‘You’ll want me sitting all day of my last days, won’t you?’ Bess nodded and smiled. ‘Mention I’m engaged, Ernestine,’ said Lise, leaning back against her hostess. ‘I’m under vow, because of next May’s Academy. Without all day

of Saturday and Sunday morning, there's no chance of me looking my best.'

Well, that was all very well, playfully : but Lise was a person to whom play was apt to turn earnest at once, if her wilfulness was aroused. This, by way of the Froebel System, should have been a point of sympathy with the mistress of Holmer ; but when the particular game was made known to her, the Duchess did not find it so.

During the interval, George and the party looming nearer, it became increasingly clear to the Duchess that she must have Lise,—*'elle s'emballait'* rapidly. She remembered yet another thing,—George, terrified of society women, enjoyed young folk. Lise was not only a social acquisition of some brilliance,—she was a girl. Given a collection which includes men like George, Giles, and the Bishop, one had better have girls. It affords a diversion after dinner, makes something to look at, and keeps them awake.

Wickford, Iveagh, and Gabriel quite agreed with the Duchess here : only, oddly enough, they did not see the said girls as necessarily appertaining to the Bishop, Sir George, and Sir Giles.

Iveagh, for instance, could have put his mother's table together for her one-handed, granted the ingredients he foresaw. Lise to himself, for instance : Bess to Wickford : Addy to du Frettay's able charge : Trenchard to Mother, whom at least he knew and trusted : Aunt Isabel to the Bishop, who could talk her down : Mrs. Courtier, as was to be hoped, to the utter prostration and finishing of Uncle Giles.

What could be nicer ? But his mother did not see thus reasonably. Wickford, for instance, as the best man present (deny it who dared) would cleave to Mrs.

Courtier, a Baron's daughter, the best woman. Dear Isabel must have George, because she wanted him. Young Frettay, because of the urgency of the table-game, would conduct herself,—that was nicely mixed already. Poor Giles should have Lise because he liked her. The Bishop would get along quite well with Adelaide. Iveagh—might not be there at all, if they could not sweep up a girl for him. He could have an engagement, or Ernestine, being prompted, could ask him down.

Anyhow, and before everything, Lise must be on the scene, about the place, if as nothing else, as a fireside ornament. Holmer firesides needed to be concealed so badly ! Since the Duchess did not get, on Friday morning, a reply in the form of full capitulation from Hatchways, she walked down herself with Adelaide to see about it.

'The children are so happy, Gertrude,' was Ernestine's way of putting it. 'We hoped you would not break us up. She goes on Monday early.'

The children!—including, the Duchess supposed, her hopeful sons. It was true, Wickford had said at breakfast he was taking the midday train to town ; but with that painting-girl about, nobody knew what his excuses were worth. Since Adelaide was also taking the train, this was one of the things the Duchess had come to see about.

'Where is she ?' she demanded, meaning Lise.

'I think they're all in the orchard. Would you care to come down the garden ? Rick's white iris is coming out.'

Cool, rather, thought the Duchess. A trifle middle-class in its coolness. It would have been better form to call the girl in to attend her. However—she rose.

'I'll go down there,' she said drily. 'Don't disturb yourself. Wickford is walking to the station immediately. I'll send him in to pick up Adelaide.'

Mrs. Redgate glanced at her wrist-watch. It struck her that Wickford, if he meant to walk, was running it fine. Still, he could always have Rick's bicycle.

'Had you not better go on?' she suggested to Adelaide. 'Wick could catch you easily.'

'I can walk as fast as Wick,' said Adelaide grumpily. She had crossed to the window in the Duchess's wake, and stood there as though hesitating whether to follow her out. Adelaide never liked to be ordered about by 'Lady Wick.' She stood on her rights there, far-sightedly. As well to begin in good time.

Mrs. Redgate, who had plenty to do, remained seated where she was, and looked at the girl, whose fine vigorous figure seemed out of keeping with her worn and rather sulky looks. She looked older than she ought in the unflattering sunlight, even a little ill. Ernestine, knowing her temptations, began to reproach herself for forgetfulness. Adelaide had not an easy time of it between her contending parents,—her life was one of saving appearances, the most wearing life there is; and Holmer, of late, had been small consolation.

'She's always sending me about with him,' jerked Adelaide with temper, her back turned. 'I'm getting sick of it.'

'Well, he likes being with you,' said Ernestine.

'I'm getting sick of it,' the girl repeated in a mutter. 'Why doesn't he speak out?'

The next instant, she regretted saying it. Luckily, it was only Ernestine. She sent a furtive glance towards her, but Mrs. Redgate was still studying her watch.

‘My hat’s in the hall,’ she said. ‘I’ll walk on with you, if you are sure you want to walk. My cycle is there.’

Adelaide wanted to walk. She walked with Ernestine, cross for the first ten minutes, but coming round.

‘You’re breaking Sam’s heart, you know,’ said Mrs. Redgate, her first remark.

‘It won’t hurt him,’ said Adelaide, but she looked relieved. She was glad Ernestine, anyhow, had noticed Sam. Presently, having plumed herself a little, she took Mrs. Redgate’s arm.

‘Tit for tat,’ she suggested, with an uneasy laugh. ‘Two can play at his game.’ She hoped to hear that Wick had marked her retaliation. Ernestine, of course, was ‘in the know.’

‘If you are flirting,’ said Ernestine gravely, ‘it’s very unkind to poor Sam.’ (Pooh, what did Sam matter?—said Miss Courtier’s expression.) ‘And Wick won’t like you any the better for it.’

‘Ernestine! What do you mean?’

‘What Wick wants,’ said Ernestine calmly, ‘is an apology.’

‘What?—Ernestine, old girl, you’re off your head.’ Adelaide was, of course, the only person in the district who would have called Mrs. Redgate ‘old girl.’

‘I am not,’ she answered, ‘really. I really think, if you want to be friends again, that is your only hope.’

Friends! And this from Ernestine, who was bound to be ‘up’ in the Suir boys! It was a pill to swallow, indeed.

‘I suppose you mean about the kid,’ said Adelaide, with a second uneasy laugh. Owing to Sir Giles and

the Frenchman, severally, she had suffered from a doubt or two, since that scene at the station.

‘ Yes. Of course you know you offended Wickford.’

‘ Ernestine, don’t talk rot!’ Adelaide, growing anxious, hung on her arm. ‘ Offended! You’re getting as bad as du Frettay.’

It was news to Ernestine that Gabriel had forestalled her; still, he had probably clothed his friendly hints too well. Adelaide required naked statements, in life; and even so, her independent spirit often qualified them as ‘ rot ’ or ‘ rats,’ and refused to take them in.

‘ But I tell you the fact,’ she said. ‘ Wick was hurt extremely. Indignant—no, offended is the word. It’s not the sort of thing he is likely to bear. How could you think it, Adelaide?’

‘ Why not?’ the girl muttered, though she did not want an answer. The clan-loyalty and simple affection that bound the brothers, never concealed, was the last thing Adelaide was ever likely to reckon upon, concerning them: for the reason that she did not wish to do so. She did not care to look upon that side of Wickford; though it was true he had made her feel it, now and then.

‘ Who told on me?’ she said, after a moody interval.

‘ But don’t you see, dear, everybody did, that last time. You took no pains to be private, did you? Iveagh’s uncle has never stopped tormenting him, and openly. They tease him about drinking to drown sorrow, too,’ said Mrs. Redgate, pensively. ‘ That must surely be you, not Sam.’

‘ Well, he does. Sam ought to know.’

‘ Well,—suppose he did even. Are you one to talk?’

‘ Drop it,’ said Adelaide with a wince. This was really bad form of Ernestine, she was going too far.

She might be said to be intruding,—none of her business. Adelaide gazed about the country, during the next interval, with the furtive, stubborn look Mrs. Redgate knew too well. One's own secret temptation, or slavery, in life, is never in the same category as other people's. It is distinguished from them,—proper in its place.

'There's no harm in drinking a bit,' was Adelaide's way out of it. 'Dozens of men do it, quite good ones too. Oh, my Great-aunt, you ask Mother——'

Ernestine cut in on the Great-aunt. 'You knew it was Wickford's special anxiety, when you picked up the story, and passed that phrase about. Didn't you? M. du Fretay told me——'

'Oh, dash!' said Adelaide. 'I suppose I did. Wick's a little goat. It was only rotting. Mean he minds it—really?' She clasped the friendly arm again, entreating or rather demanding reassurance.

'Of course he minds! Iveagh's wildness, his bitterness, is not funny to us,—we cannot think so. It is beyond us,' said Ernestine, with a thought to the circus clown. It is so hopeless to argue on the point of humour, ever.

'That kid!' muttered Adelaide. 'I say,—do *you* mind, Ernestine?'

'I should have minded if the boy had died, two summers since at Oxford, or lost his reason, as was quite——'

'Oh, rattlesnakes!' said Adelaide, cordially: and nipped the friendly arm, as a broad hint she had had enough of it. Rats and rattlesnakes was how the fair Miss Courtier preferred to think of Iveagh's business, exclusively. She could not change her emblematic conception of it, really, at this time of day. That was too

much to expect of anyone. . . . All the same she decided, before Wickford overtook them, to say something or other to him: just enough to straighten matters, if not quite an apology. It was distinctly worth it, even at her present stage with Sam, which Wick hardly realised, as it happened. Ernestine was right so far,—though she was certainly interfering more than a little so to talk to her. She was (in the expression du Frettay liked) putting in an oar.

Ernestine, returning to Hatchways as soon as Wickford overhauled them, much feared she had put the oar in too late to save Adelaide from the rocks, as regarded that self-contained little personage, their noble Duke. She reflected with sorrow that she was late in the matter. She had been so anxious about Lise, so troubled over Bess, that she had overlooked Adelaide altogether. Poor Adelaide. . . . Yet she greatly feared M. du Frettay was right, and her idea of humour and Wickford's could never, never match. And if so, it was better to stop thinking about marrying, really. It really was!

II

We return to the Duchess.

On the way down to the orchard, the Duchess stopped by the white iris. Actually out! How did the people manage it? That particular kind had no business to be out till May. The Duchess was, of course, something of a gardener, having made, in her single person, Holmer House. Thus she could reckon, almost to a day, the gross favouritism exhibited by that flag-plant, flowering in April at Hatchways.

Next, she passed a grey kitten, rolling in apparent delirium among the bees in a row of pale-blue flowers.

The kitten, inordinately prolonged, and exhibiting the wrong, or dappled side of its person in a flagrant manner, did not interest the Duchess. The blue flowers did, because she could not for the life of her remember the name of them. It worried her all the way to the orchard turn.

‘Iveagh,’ she said in consequence, as soon as she saw him. ‘What is that?’

She extended a blue flower, which she had picked. She had picked a white iris, also. Iveagh, answering, observed the fact in consternation. His mother had been taking things, unasked, out of Mrs. Redgate’s borders!

‘Those are Mrs. Elphinstone’s iris, M. du Frettay says,’ remarked the Ryeborn girl, who was painting under the shadow of blossoms.

‘Fleur-de-lys,’ said Iveagh in that direction. ‘Ripping,—put one in.’

‘Where is Lise?’ said the Duchess, having recognised the Ryeborn girl; for the hammock near the pair was empty, albeit faintly swinging: something had recently been there. Wickford also was absent,—nobody present, in short. The Duchess prepared to go on.

‘Mother, look here,—look *here*, Mother,’ said Iveagh, outraged. ‘You haven’t looked, and it’s gettin’ on for done.’

She paused to glance passingly at the portrait. It was not bad,—obviously Lise. It had her look about it. Yes, it was cleverish. . . . Iveagh, kneeling at her side, stared in silence, eating grass. Foolish and tiresome,—she preferred not to have him near her.

‘Go and find her for me,’ she said, pushing him slightly. Strange, the distaste she felt for him,—dis-

like almost,—she dared not look into it. It was growing daily. She trusted George would relieve her sight.

He was on his feet almost as she touched him ; but paused, glancing as though for instruction at the girl.

‘ She went to fetch her milk, I think,’ said Miss Rye-born, without looking up. ‘ Down by the kitchen,—you will meet her coming back.’

So that was it,—a studio interval. The model taking refreshment, the artist free, if a little frightened. The Duchess, making up her mind, sat down deliberately. Her countenance, no doubt, conveyed her intentions, for Iveagh, in the act of going, hung on his heel.

If his mother was going to rag Bess in Wick’s absence, reflected Iveagh, it was as well somebody should be about. There was, further, the question of Lise’s portrait, on which it was advisable someone of experience (in the Duchess) should keep an eye. His mother had already been picking things up about Mrs. Redgate’s borders,—she might easily, unless observed, make off with Bess’s portrait too. Bess’s or Lise’s,—Iveagh had not quite determined the point, though he had devoted several odd half-hours, of late, to chasing a solution. Two girls were in it,—two characters,—one mirrored through the other. To watch so mixed a thing as that portrait grow out of its earliest stages was fascinating : more, it was mysterious. Iveagh took to such mysteries kindly, dreaming and reading alternately, those long, lovely mornings of awakening summer. At least, it was a precious thing.

He sank down again in the long grass at Bess’s side, a little nearer than before, and Bess’s blue eyes stole to him doubtfully. Did he, she wondered, really mean to stay ? How naughty, when his mother told him to

go,—and how brave ! Bess, of course, was terrified of the Duchess,—worse than Lise.

‘ You paint on commission, Miss Ryeborn ? ’ began the Duchess, settling to it.

‘ Oh no,’ said Bess. ‘ I paint for love. I am only learning at present,’ she added, shyly.

‘ I should say,’ said the Duchess, in an Oxborough manner of judgment, ‘ you are well advanced.’

‘ I should say you’re gettin’ on, Bess,’ said Iveagh.

‘ That portrait is not for sale, then,’ proceeded the Duchess, disregarding Iveagh. He had always been like that. Of old, his father had seen to him. Now—well, she left it to George.

‘ I understand from my son,’ she went on, still graciously, ‘ that you might take offers, if pressed.’

‘ Wick been makin’ you offers ? ’ asked Iveagh, leaning nearer. He whistled. ‘ I say,—I hadn’t heard that.’

The corners of Miss Ryeborn’s mouth twitched, and her colour mounted faintly. He was behaving very badly, and had better, if he could do nothing more useful, go away. Bess touched the shadows on Lise’s painted hair, while she reflected thus, and steadied her countenance.

‘ I told—your son I would give it him,’ she said, avoiding, with great propriety, the Ducal name. ‘ I mean, if he really thinks it good enough for Captain Elphinstone. But it isn’t fair,’ Bess added lower, in her own person.

‘ Fair ? ’ asked the Duchess.

‘ No. Because he has her,’ said Bess, ‘ and we shan’t have anything to remind us. It hardly seems fair he should have both.’

‘ You’re fond of her, then,’ said the Duchess : her son being stationary, watching the moving brush.

'I don't see how anyone can help it,' said Bess.

'She's good-looking, of course,' said the Duchess.

'I suppose that is all artistic people mind.'

'She is beautiful,—but we mind about other things,' said Bess.

Iveagh's eyes had moved from the brush's point to the hand guiding it. Bess had a beautiful, capable hand, like her aunt's,—and as steady, usually.

'You're spoilin' it,' he reproached her. 'Let it alone.' Bess removed the brush-tip, and her hand dropped beside her. She sat very still.

'So you study character, do you?' said the Duchess, condescending anew. 'Let us hear what you make of Mrs. Elphinstone's,—it would be interesting.'

'I shouldn't have thought you wanted to ask,' said Iveagh, roughly, in the pause.

'That's it,' said Bess, to shelter him. 'I'm so stupid. There's no way I can explain those things except by drawing. Sometimes I get it then.'

'Ah,' said the Duchess. 'Well, but you paint creatures, I understand from Ernestine. Rather than persons, as a rule.'

'Yes,' said Bess, recovering. 'And people tell me there is only one kind of character in cats. I can't *explain* to them there are hundreds. I can only draw the difference,—and hope they'll see.'

'You take a look at her book,' advised Iveagh, subsiding into the grass. 'Characters in it enough to make a play. I expect she sees into us, too, pretty fairly,' he added lower.

'Why do you expect that?' said his mother sharply.

'Always sittin' about and sayin' nothing.' He threw a sly look sidelong. 'Paintin's only an excuse——'

‘Iveagh, how hateful!’ She turned on him. ‘Do you pretend I spy?’

Used names, did they?—well!—‘Don’t attend to him,’ said the Duchess. She rose, having had enough of them. ‘Ah,—there is Lise.’

There was Lise, certainly, hatless and sun-warmed sweetly, and the Duke in attendance, carrying an empty milk-glass. Lise had the same grey kitten the Duchess had noticed in the flower-bed across her arms, mother-wise,—the kitten being still inverted, languorous, and prolonged inordinately.

‘Here he is,’ said Lise to the world. ‘The heat of’m, feel,—he’s like a furnace.’ She thrust the grey kitten at Iveagh. ‘You’d say he’d drink taken by the look of’m, but it’s milk at worst. . . . Oh, good morning to you, Duchess. You don’t mind cats?’

The Duchess could stand cats,—there were plenty about at Holmer: though she had come upon more serious business. The Pickle, right way up, lay across Lise like a scarf while she explained it. The Pickle, drunk with sun, and sleep, and milk, and the drone of bees, was in a malleable condition, suitable for use as a stage property. That was no doubt why Lise, with an instinct for properties, had assumed him. All the same, her pretty dark eyes gazed across the Pickle’s drunken corpse, resting on the Duchess’s face, attentive.

‘Oh yes,’ said Lise, having been explained to. ‘I like S’ George. He’s a flirt,—oh, yes, he is, Wickford. You get him alone and try.’

‘I have, but I never noticed it,’ said Wickford, sitting down on one of the camp-stools.

‘Well, try again,’ said Lise, encouraging. ‘It’s like this,’—to his mother,—‘for dinner on Saturday, I

shall be delighted, thank you,—I've got a frock that's been wasted, so far. But I'm booked to Ernestine for this week——'

'Oh, Ernestine will let you go,' said the Duchess.

'But what if I'll not be let,' smiled Lise. 'You see, I'm not through with Hatchways, so to speak. I've a way of getting behind in my duties always, leaving things to the last——'

'What courage,—what glorious courage!' thought Bess, putting in swift touches to the portrait, from the life, this time. Bess had always known the Irish were valiant: but this!

'There's this picture half-done,' said Lise, re-draping the Pickle, who had slumped a little. 'Oh, well, three-quarters, Bess. Destined to me husband, you know,—I'd not dare to show myself in his presence, less than complete. Mark'd never understand artistic vaguery, would he, Wickford? He'd expect me all properly noted down——'

'It is practically finished,' said the Duchess, who, of course, allowed for jesting. In the lifelong company of Suirs, one had to do so. 'I have no doubt Miss Rye-born will touch it up,' she continued, 'and let us see it on Sunday at the house. Sir George——'

'If she dares!' cried Lise. 'Touch up me features in me absence! Excuse me, Duchess, but I've not taken to that as yet, for all the chances of the Indian climate. I trust me face still as me Creator made it——'

Wickford, the Duchess regretted to see, was laughing, on his camp-stool, beneath his hand. It was true, Wickford used improper language himself at times. All the same, she began to realise slowly, looking round her that she was being resisted: what is more, that

the company,—children, as Ernestine rightly called them,—were more or less at one, in this silly game. Wickford on the camp-stool, Iveagh in the grass, that little silent Miss Ryeborn, eyes lowered demurely as she worked at her drawing,—could it be? The Duchess gathered her dignity.

‘I expect my turn, Lise,’ she remarked dryly. ‘After all, Mark is something to me. I have a letter from him——’

‘Confiding me?’ laughed Lise. ‘Ah, but that’s like him. I have a letter myself, as it happens, in which he hinted as much. He wouldn’t know, though, I had accepted Ernestine, would he? It’s a pity I have so little time. . . . By the way, does he say in yours anything about this doing of his, for which the Company praised him? I’m crazy to know, and as usual he says nothing of himself. Really,’ said Lise, ‘you’d think honours descended by a chance of the climate on Mark, he deserves them so little——’

‘He mentioned it,’ said the Duchess.

‘To be sure,’ said Lise, ‘but does he explain?’ Her dark eyes across the Pickle were fixed again, eagerly. She was not playing at anything now, she wanted to know.

‘I’ll show you the letter if you come up,’ said the Duchess.

‘Oh, that’s not fair!’—from both her sons. Mrs. Elphinstone’s sallow cheek flushed slightly.

‘Very well,’ she said rather quietly, relapsing and leaning back. ‘I’ll telegraph. I told Ernestine I would this time, since he’s annoyed me. I will not discover my own husband’s doings from the papers,—nor from others’ letters, if it comes to that. He hates wires about nothing,—but he shall have a long one.

I hope he'll enjoy it. It'll be a lesson to him to boast a little to me, once for all !'

Iveagh in the grass had turned, and was looking towards her curiously. He saw something in her,—pride, wounded pride or affection wounded,—that he had never seen before. Nor was it his mother who had hurt her,—it was Mark. He marvelled, too, what Mark had done,—this time. . . . Bess was also noting swiftly, delicately, the changes of that lovely face : but her noting was not done in thought. She had got the Fitzmaurice in Lise, and was filling it into the painted character, while yet she remained in the mood. Her watery nature never tarried in one mood long.

'Blessed baby !' said Lise, kissing the Pickle, who was sleeping. 'Excuse me, company,—he's so nice to hold. . . . Aunt Gertrude, look here. I'll do your dinner and the night,—a bargain. That'll give me good time to flirt with S' George. Sunday I'll come back here, to Ernestine. The last Sunday, I could not leave her in the lurch. If you had an idea what she has done for me——'

The Duchess had no idea, nor desired to have. She was growing incensed, at such absurd behaviour. What did the girl think she was, anyhow, to treat her and her serious invitation like this ? That the invitation crossed Mrs. Redgate's, trespassed on it, the Duchess conveniently forgot, as she forgot she had refused Lise in the original instance.

'You're poachin', Mother,' said the Duke aside, in the tennis-player's term. It made her angrier yet to be so prompted,—for of course she poached ! Oxboroughs, in our records, have always poached upon their neighbours' rights. That Hatchways land was a freehold for centuries past, had at many times annoyed the Duchess.

That Ernestine was a freehold, even more a pride of our present state,—sister in spirit to Squire Hampden, right off-shoot of the Commons' long strife in our noble history,—she forgot whenever she could.

'You'd better go in, Wickford,' she said, being annoyed with him. 'You're keeping Adelaide.'

He rose, at the reminder, with a glance at his watch, but he lingered still. Wickford felt the battle approached its climax. Lise was valiant, certainly, but she was not strong. Iveagh was hardly to be trusted, in this company. Moreover, Wickford had an idea his mother would be driven to hit beyond Lise very shortly. Mrs. Redgate's representative was there, after all, present to all their consciousness in look, and bearing, and tranquil absorption in her private work. Further Addy was a good walker,—in short, the Duke gave himself five minutes longer to see fair play. He little thought to be himself included.

'I couldn't think of making bargains of any sort,' his mother was saying. 'I'm a little tired of nonsense, Lise. Just tell me what you mean to do,—I can't stay playing all the morning.' She was treating Mrs. Elphinstone as a girl again,—first sign of vexation,—one to Lise!

'I'm thinking hard,' said Lise, with the greatest good-humour. 'There's really only one other way I can see of it, Aunt Gertrude, that would suit all me obligations, and that——'

'Well?' said the Duchess patiently.

'That is that Bess should come up with me on Saturday. Then we could paint in peace, see our friends on the spot, and dine in comfort afterwards.'

'Ripping!'—from both the Duchess's sons. The proposal seemed to be popular, with the gentlemen.

Bess herself moved and coloured, laying down her brush. Like the Duke, she had not expected to be comprised in the combat. She thought she had had her share.

‘ Since she is dining already——’ proceeded Lise.

‘ Excuse me,’ said the Duchess.

‘ Well, is she not ? ’ Lise was held up. ‘ I’m sorry,—I’m dreaming. I thought Wickford said——’

‘ He had no business to.’ Greatly put out, the Duchess rose. Things altogether were getting beyond her.

‘ I ask the company’s pardon,’ said the Duke, laying a competent grasp on things, as he always did so soon as his mother showed a strain. Bess had also arisen frightened. ‘ My mistake only,—it’s true I had no absolute authority. . . . Only whatever I did or did not say, Mother, Miss Ryeborn comes to us now. We shall be extremely happy to see her——’

‘ Go it ! ’ thought the born rebels, Iveagh and Lise.

‘ Afterwards,’ said the Duchess, half-turning. ‘ I cannot change the length of my table—even for you.’

‘ There’s room at my table, I hope, for my friends,’ said Wickford, his aspect changing slightly.

‘ You really have such a number,’ said his mother, audibly. She prepared to go.

‘ Mother, I’ll trouble you—— ! ’ cried Wickford, furious : and broke off, every atom of expression fading from his face. He was holding in the Suir temper with both hands : Bess, had she been capable of comparisons, would have been inevitably reminded of ‘ *that* book,—*you* know,’—Sir Guy of sainted memory. The heir of Wickford was literally rigid with the strain, and

quite incapable,—alas for those who had pinned their hopes to him !

‘ Don’t cry,’ said Iveagh, swift and low, kneeling up in the grass at Bess’s side. He saved the painting with a clever snatch, for she was reckless of it. There was a moment of really painful suspense, those that had pinned their hopes to her, in turn, fearing that she must give way. But Bess did not.

‘ I’m sorry,’ she said gently, in Wickford’s direction. ‘ You are kind. I can’t anyhow, as it happens. I am going—I promised—to help Irene with the children’s drawings on Saturday night.’

First-class,—could not be bettered ! Iveagh, still guarding the portrait, turned inviting eyes to his mother. *Now* then—

‘ I am sure we regret——’ began the Duchess, quite mechanically. She found she had to say it, for she was unhappy,—shaken. She had clashed badly with her son before the world, which hurt her pride, maternal and other. She was rather white in consequence. She hesitated a moment before the girl’s aspect, as Bess faced her gravely,—so like Ernestine. Then she turned about, and moved away towards the outer gate, by the orchard path.

Victory to the rebel horde !—only one, the latest, had been wounded.

‘ I b—beg your pardon, Miss Ryeborn,’ said Wickford, recovering from the awful effort of his self-control. ‘ And I beg your aunt’s. I lost my temper. Of all b—beastly——’ Whereupon his Grace choked, and went off, in the other direction, to Adelaide.

‘ She’s crying, Lise,’ appealed Iveagh, indignant. He had managed last time his mother hit a girl. But what could a man do now ?

‘ Well,’ said Mrs. Elphinstone, slowly reviving out of her unusual stupor. ‘ If that’s not the sweetest lie I ever heard ! And using Renie, of all people on this dear earth, to do for her ! ’

With which Lise and the Pickle combined,—even as one individual,—fell into Bess’s arms.

XVI

INCLUSION OF SIR GEORGE

‘ I LOVE her,’ said Lise to Ernestine, that evening. ‘ It was the way she said it, you ought to have heard. It’s not as if she takes naturally to untruth, either——’

Mrs. Redgate’s expression, dimpling a little, admitted it. The Ryeborns had not that pure relish for romance as such that distinguished the Fitzmaurice family. They might be called sticklers for the stiffer Puritan virtues, since they hailed from the north.

‘ Don’t you laugh at me,’ cried Lise, ‘ when I’m confessing.’

‘ Are you ? ’

‘ To be sure. I’m coming on to it. I’m going back on my ways,’ announced Lise, ‘ from this minute onward. Indeed, I’ve begun already, if you knew. Ever since Mark wrote I’ve been thinking of it—I can’t imagine why I did not sooner——’

‘ Thinking of what ? ’ said Ernestine. The girl at her knee—Lise was sitting on the floor—was silent.

‘ I’m not good, you know, by nature,—’ she began again.

‘ Good enough,’ said Ernestine.

‘ No—Wickford beats me. Oh, dear life, his face was like a play ! ’ She slipped from strict confession into mirth, remembering it. ‘ I can’t but think, Ernestine, if Wick hit out at his mother once he’d be

the better for it. However, that's neither here nor there——'

'He's got to live with her,' said Ernestine.

'Yes, that's the practical view,' said Lise. 'Go on stroking my hair, that's what Mark does sometimes.' She shut her eyes. 'Ernestine, to resume, I am—not—good. Now it's said there's no gainsaying it. I'd not considered enough when I came here. Wick's in the right of it,—there are times when it's best to think ahead. Now, for want of doing my consideration in time, I've got to go back on my ways, and that's difficult.' She put her little hands across her face.

'Is it really necessary, do you think?' said Ernestine. It seemed so absurd, somehow, for Lise to go back.

'Yes, I'm going to,—don't you disturb me. There's only one way to do it too, to my seeing,' said Lise. 'And that's to show him my devotion to Mark.'

'Lise!'

For she had broken into tears. She had long been wanting to abandon herself on this subject. She had come near it, again and again, during these evening interviews, but she could not. The profound reticence of her race, that lies immediately behind its surface fluency, withheld her. Of the things that matter in life, it is all those people can do to speak at all. Lise could have flickered, chattered about her relations with Mark forever, merrily, mockingly, half bitterly as she had done that morning: but it took the supreme effort, even with a woman,—even with this woman,—to give them away.

And yet there was no transgression 'in it,'—she had given all she could find in her nature to Mark, and there was much. It was simply the fact of difference

discovered, irremediable, that hurt her affectionateness profoundly. Not once, but many times he had wounded her, till it became just too much, in the last letter, to be borne.

Ernestine, greatly touched to be trusted at this stage, soon reached the bottom of it. Of course there was difference,—how could it be otherwise? And of course Lise had thought that out, long before her companion Wickford suggested that she should do so. And of course—so naturally—the renewal of Iveagh, the sight, sound, and feel of him, ardent, supple, and responsive, had hammered in that difference, cold into Lise's soul. . . . What a torment, thought Ernestine, is brain, real logic, in a woman! She put Adelaide, and Adelaide's confidence, often beside this girl, as the 'confession' proceeded, torn out of her, no truth spared, both little hands wrung with the strain. Adelaide, of course, with a little tempting, a little spurring, would have told anybody anything. It would have dropped out—dripped, as Iveagh said—and Adelaide, for all her restive vanity, been unaware of the real betrayal. Adelaide was always betraying, the precious and worthless alike which she happened to be holding, having no power to range those possessions of the spirit, and to keep control.

Women perhaps more than men store this spiritual knowledge. They are not vessels, they are caskets for the truths of life, with a constant chance to sort, store, and give away. To throw away too, for—with respect to M. du Frettay's probable sentiments,—all truth is by no means worth treasuring. Ernestine stored like a good housewife, orderly and attentive: she gave perhaps too cautiously, and guarded for her musing too much. Lise had a few jewels of great worth she

clung to, and tossed the rest of her glittering dust about the world. Adelaide had lost most of her possessions, or tarnished, or borrowed for the moment's need. She was very, very denuded, for a rich girl,—so Ernestine had thought that morning.

And Lise was rich : for she had, in spite of all, the love and troth of a good man. She knew it.

'He loves me, he does,' she sobbed, 'and I am a wretch to talk like this. I'll never forgive myself, once I get to the end of it. It's beautiful, quite, how he looks at me, when he's sure I'm not attending. It's only he will not—will not show me the best of him, when I know it's there ! I ought to be content with knowing it, ought I not, Ernestine ? If ever he lost his head a little,—if ever he boasted, or sulked, or swore at me, or stopped considering,—or kissed my shoe as Iveagh did in the garden, the night I told him I'd promised myself away.' She shivered from head to foot, her fingers wrung, with sheer longing for that remembered tenderness. 'But that's so degrading to a man—a real man—is it not, Ernestine ?'

'Surely not,—your shoe,' thought Ernestine, but she did not say it. It was not the moment, clearly, to flatter Lise. She could see her, in fancy, flinging herself at Mark again and again, baffled every time by his foresight, 'consideration,' his excellent self-effacement, his fine cool front. . . . Perhaps, after this separation, there was hope of more from Mark : not to mention that with Lise imploring like this at the altars of Nature, Nature might step in. She was so much the better for her stay in England. . . .

Lise, led on to confidence, told her one or two of her husband's 'doings,' extracted with pain from him and others,—more from others than from him. Mrs. Red-

gate smiled listening, seeing her dark eyes shimmer like stars,—there was a nobleness in both, well-matching ; and at once, rummaging in her museum of useful memories, produced other instances of Mark. It was easy, for there were heaps of them, ridiculously many, once collected and built up. Wickford, half mocking, half admiring, had told her some. Gertrude had told her plenty, solemnly. Sir George——

‘ Oh, I’m glad to be seeing S’ George,’ said Lise contentedly. ‘ There’s a man I like ! I was not specially interested in Captain Elphinstone, Ernestine, I may mention, when I last came across him. That is, I was getting curious in my fashion about the Duchess’s young man, but not enough to make indecent enquiries. Still, I had a notion even then S’ George knew a thing or two——’

‘ He knew him better than anybody,’ said Ernestine, ‘ at one time, when the Captain first went out,—when he lost half his bridge in the flood in Kashmir.’

‘ It was somebody else’s bridge,’ said Lise, hastily. ‘ I assure you, that was not Mark’s fault,—I know about this. The good people despatched him as usual to make the best of a bad job. Talk of silk purses, the things he’s had to do,—shameful sin it is not to give fresh work to such a worker, but that’s the world ! Original genius,’ asserted Lise, ‘ muddles things up, and the workers put it straight again. The man who invented that bridge died young, Mark said,—the gods wanted him. But the Government wanted Mark. . . . Well, what are you laughing at, it’s the sober truth I’m telling you.’

‘ Please go on with the truth,’ said Ernestine.

‘ Well, so he had barely time to think of planning his purse, the poor boy, when the river came down and

carried off the sow, I mean the foundations. So there he was. And he was rightly puzzled what to do, since it flooded out his quarters simultaneously, and washed most of the works away. So he spent his time piling coals of fire on the people's heads (which is his habit) by saving the cattle and stock.'

'Not only the cattle,' said Ernestine.

'And the mothers and babies,' said Lise, 'but that's by the way, for Mark.' Her eyes glimmered for a little. 'Ernestine, I hope you see how essentially unimportant, compared with Government heads of cattle, the mothers and babies are?'

'Very well, for the present,' said Ernestine.

'We do not mention them, being Mark,' said Lise, cuddling down her *cendré* head.

'We do, being Sir George,' said Mrs. Redgate. 'I have heard him mention them very eloquently.'

'Have you? Now that's remarkable.' Another interlude of thinking it out. 'Very well—listen—I will get him to do so, to-morrow night. He shall tell them how Mark fought with the river in Kashmir, saving the whole population complete and single-handed when he was no more than Iveagh's age—well, hardly. And if the moral needs pointing more,' vowed Lise, 'I'll do it meself.'

This was her plan, as anyone knowing her might have expected. Ernestine was only afraid she would go too far, once launched on the interesting course. Lise was tasting for the first time the bitter joys of the penitentiary, quite new to her probably. It is not entirely devoid of dramatic savour, the penitent's attitude, and it is a pity not to test its possibilities to the uttermost, whilst so righteously engaged.

Besides, she needed in any case some plan of moral

support,—some general line of campaign, for her evening at Holmer. A Fitzmaurice liked to look forward to any kind of warfare, social or otherwise. Lise was certain the Duchess, left to herself, would make that dinner as dull as ditchwater : and her spirit went feeling for the possible elements of outbreak immediately. Iveagh, she knew, would break out, or break up, at a touch from her : interesting knowledge, though painful, since it hinted her reproach. It had been a question to Lise's gentle spirit, for some time, which it was best to do for him. Now Wick, and Bess, and Ernestine, and Mark (by sedulous revival and restoration) urged her to break up Iveagh : to assume the wifely posture, poise the spear, and shiver him, once for all.

Well, dared anybody assert Mrs. Elphinstone was not at liberty to do this, if she would ? She must do something for Ernestine, and Bess, whom she loved, before she left. The Holmer dinner (else as dull as ditchwater) was just a timely occasion for a wifely gesture. Armed with Mark and the mother and baby, clad in her nicest clothes, with ' S' George ' to assist the proceedings, she would simply walk over Iveagh, and leave him there.

Ernestine saw the plan. She longed, in the sensible, sensitive depths of her, to beg Lise, with the great power she wielded, to spare the boy. She felt the other way, hers, of slow remedy and natural growth, was best. But there is no warring with natures, none. She left Lise to her nature,—her ' natural ' as M. du Frettay called it,—which was a very sweet one. She only went to bed reflecting how unfair the gifts to women are ; that Adelaide, needing to mate, and to mate a higher grade than Sam, should struggle in vain for the remotest portion of that captivating power ; and that

Lise should suffer and make suffer, in spite of her own gentler wish, settled as she really was in life and spirit, through having too much.

‘Yes,—yes,’ said Sir George to Wickford, who travelled down with him on Saturday: assenting and weighing in one, at intervals, as a good physician does.

‘Just so,—yes,’ he said to Wickford and Gabriel alternately, as they walked up with him from Holmer station, one on each side. They discussed, shot remarks at one another across him, they rotted too,—it pleased him to see the friends they were. He clasped Gabriel’s arm and not Wickford’s, but that was not favouritism,—it was because Gabriel inclined to go too fast. Mentally, for Wickford, of course: physically, for himself, Sir George could have kept pace with six of him. He remained, despite his long London sojourn, in splendid fighting form.

‘But he’s better, the boy,’ he said at last. ‘He must be better, for you to talk so of him. . . . Ah, you never saw him at the worst,’—he spoke to his left-hand neighbour. ‘We were anxious for a bit, weren’t we, Wick? It was a bad age,—a very bad age.’

‘He’s certainly better,’ said Wickford. ‘He’s not talked rot or used language—real language—for quite a time. He still slangs the animals horrid, Tim says, but that’s more hopeful——’

‘I’ll give him animals to slang,’ said Sir George pensively, ‘if he comes with me. Not so easy to be revenged on, either. . . . You were saying, Wick?’

‘Fleas?’ asked Gabriel, interested.

‘Far worse,’ said Sir George. ‘Things you nice young men never dreamed of. Sorry, Wick.’

‘He’s still off and on about going,’ said Wickford.

'He's days when his one desire's to get rid of us all,—*wish*, all right, du Frettay. That's my public stop, I use it sometimes to Mother. Now don't interrupt again, because there's something I'm trying to say.'

'Don't,' advised Gabriel in the next interval.

'Don't fight, boys,' said Sir George, in the next.

'He puts me out by naggin' at my wordin',' explained Wickford. 'On my honour, I believe he thinks he talks English better than me——'

'I,' said du Frettay softly. The Duke proceeded.

'What I mean is this. Mrs. Redgate——'

'To be sure. What of her?' said Sir George.

'Well, she says it's only his stinkin' pride now that's detaining him. He's got an idea we're sending him for his good; well, at his worst, of course, that made him want to go to the bad to pay us out——'

'Oh, come, come,' said Sir George. 'He doesn't treat you like that.'

Wickford paused and coloured. He had said 'we' for his mother, of course, in du Frettay's presence. Now he wondered if he should have attacked the subject at all. So doubting and debating, he was rapidly dropping into voicelessness, when Gabriel, from the other side, took up the tale.

'He only wants anyone he trusts to assure him there are heaps of things he can do,' he said rapidly.

'Is that for me?' asked Sir George. 'But you know, Gabriel, I am not so sure of it.'

'Well, let him know that, sir, and he's finished,' said du Frettay. 'He'll never stir, if you go to take him on a convalescent trip or a Grand Tour to change the scenery, believe me. He'd sooner change the scene here, once for all, with a shot through his head.'

'Does he know?' signalled Sir George to Wickford.

‘Not unless the boy told him,’ said Wickford beneath his breath.

Du Frettay glanced at them both bright-eyed, but offered no question. He soon looked back at the sky, as was his habit, when walking. He had no wish at all to interfere with experts in any subject,—the sky sufficed his needs.

‘You’re a bright lad,’ said Sir George, taking hold of his arm again. ‘And I wish to goodness you’d come along yourself, and learn your own planet before you start on the atmosphere——’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Gabriel, without lowering his eyes.

‘What things do you think Iveagh can do. Can you tell us any?’

‘He can shoot straight,’ said the Duke.

‘Pfui!’ said Gabriel. ‘I am alluding to his head at present, not his power of emptying other people’s. Animals’, pardon——’

‘People,’ admitted Sir George, ‘at times.’

‘Tiens! Then you shoot the German officials? I often wondered how you really got round them, in some of your books. . . . Sir-George, listen! Iveagh can do heaps of things. He’s a head for figures like few I’ve found. He notices all, when he seems most sleepy. He’s the eyes of a cat, and the ear of whatever-it-is, and he draws elegantly——’

‘Draws?’

‘To be sure. Accurate drawing, not your artistic splashing about. He can draw what he sees,’ said Gabriel with a reminiscence, ‘not what he thinks you thought he was going to see——’

‘I’ll set Miss Ryeborn on you,’ said Wickford.

‘Who’s Miss Ryeborn?’ said Sir George.

‘She doesn’t matter,’ said Gabriel.

'Oh, doesn't she!' said the Duke.

'Sir-George! Do stop-him-off! I'm talking. He's jealous of my facts, and wants to drown them in sentiment——'

'I'm not jealous,' said Wickford, turning very red.

'All right.' Sir George laughed, and got hold of Wickford's arm in turn. 'We're neither of us jealous, but really for an outsider he knows rather much.'

'He's staying with Mrs. Redgate,' said Wickford. They all walked on for a time, and felt better by degrees. It was not an easy subject, of course, to treat *ensemble*.

'Enfin——' said Gabriel.

'Anyhow,' said Wickford, 'there we are. The kid's no fool, is what du Frettay means, though he may like to appear one. Of course, along of du Frettay, he may not have chosen to, I can't say. I always supposed du Frettay picked Iveagh out because he said least of us——'

'You may go on,' said Gabriel, studying the sky.

'Thanks. What are you looking at?'

'He thinks we thought he was going to see an aeroplane,' said Sir George. 'Get on, Wick, really: you'll never be done.'

'I can't somehow, when he's listening. . . . Iveagh's a lot cleverer than I am,' broke out Wickford, 'that's the fact of it. I swear I'm just put to it to think what I'll do without him when he goes—on the estate, I mean. The people are all in his pocket—I'm nowhere with them,—and if it's bad here, it's worse in Ireland—what are you laughin' at?' He broke short.

'You may come into your own,' suggested Sir George, 'if I carry him off.'

'I might—here,' said the Duke, considering it.

'Not there,—no chance! But we were talkin' of his attainments, not his impudence, if I remember. . . . He's beastly good on plants, and all these last months, on and off, he's been reading like the deuce. On my honour I believe he's been reading half the time lately when Lise thinks he's looking at her——'

'Hullo!' said Sir George, his thoughtful brow clearing. 'Is Lise still here?'

'Rather, sir,—you're going to meet her. We've got,' said the Duke, duty-bound, 'an appallin' entertainment for you this evening——'

'It's very kind of your mother,' said Sir George, his thoughtful brow clouding again.

'But you may have tea at Hatchways first.' This from Gabriel, who had had the immense satisfaction of really seeing an aeroplane, while the latter conversation proceeded. It had flown singing—*vrombissant* delicately—across his spirit's sky. Sir George was too old, and the Duke too unintelligent, to discover it. Iveagh, whom they patronised, would have found it at once—at once! It was gratifying, altogether. . . . 'You may have tea with us,' he said.

'No, no, Gabriel, I may not. I shall have tea with Wickford's mother, who is my oldest friend——'

'And talk all this through again, much more connectedly. How fortunate, first,' said Gabriel, 'that we have given you light.'

Sir George glanced at Wick, to see how he was taking it. 'He really does talk English very nicely,' he suggested. 'One can bear a good deal of pertness, when it is put so well.'

'He's welcome,' said Wickford: and the friend saw it was all right. The little Duke's singular personal realm of pride was known to him, as was Gabriel's

native realm of impudence also. But he saw that in this case, in the best accord of a common object, a common desire,—a common *wish*,—the nations had shaken down.

‘George,—thank goodness!’

‘Gertrude,—I am very glad.’

They met as old friends, and both remarks were heartfelt. Sir George was not at all glad to pay week-end visits to the Duchess of Wickford, he disliked it thoroughly : but he was glad to see Gertrude, always. He was only sorry to find her looking so aged and careworn. The first thing the friendly eye noted was that she looked tired to death.

‘I can’t think what’s come over me,’ she admitted, after a little desultory talk and feeding, ‘but I’m afraid of this affair to-night. I have a presentiment things will not go right with it.’

‘How’s that?’ said Sir George, who had never heard Gertrude admit as much before, even of her most ill-fated entertainments. It was remarkable.

‘I can’t think, for I’ve certainly done my best for it. I suppose I’m rubbed-up,’ said the Duchess, adopting the Oxborough expression out of the void. ‘I’ve had extremely tiresome people lately, that’s the fact. My temper’s gone, George, I warn you——’

‘You want Ernestine,’ said Sir George cheerfully. ‘She’ll set you right as soon as she comes. No more tea, thank you. I hope she’s well?’

‘She’s not coming to-night,’ said the Duchess.

‘Not?—Oh, I’m sorry, Gertrude. Don’t say that.’

It was Gertrude’s face that said, of course, more plain than words, the state of things. She looked miserable, really : even as, at the worst of Iveagh, the

friend had never seen her look. He searched his spirit, during the subsequent minutes, to conceive what it could be. Ernestine had stood out about something,—he saw it like that at once. She was given to standing out, or standing up, at intervals. Yet she was so very hard to quarrel with, so straight, so liberal. . . .

‘She’s setting my own children against me,’ said the Duchess.

‘No, no,’ said Sir George quietly. ‘The contrary.’

‘How do you know?’

‘How should I, but by knowing her? I have her letters. She has not spoken a word of this.’

The Duchess was silent. She had spoken a word of it, to various Oxboroughs, far from intimate; she had had to, needing to defend herself. Yet it only looked to her, in her aggrieved state, as if she missed Ernestine more than Ernestine her, the idea of which was absurd and shameful. Should it not be something to Ernestine, to have lost her regard?

‘Iveagh’s behaviour is abominable,’ said the Duchess, by no distant line of communication. ‘He can’t even treat me with decent civility in public. He is always,’ she added, ‘haunting that place.’

‘Hatchways? But Lise has been staying there, hasn’t she?’

‘Long before that.’

‘Gertrude, will you take my word that, by all the evidence I ever had, Ernestine has kept Iveagh in the ways of civility, and civilisation too,—when it was very difficult. How could she, caring for you, do otherwise?’

‘She never cared for me.’

‘Caring for him, then,’ said Sir George patiently. Things were certainly very bad.

'Oh, yes, I dare say! She never cared for me,' reiterated the Duchess. 'It's all receiving, no returning. Isabel says she's cold.'

'Please do not give me Isabel. I value you so much more. I remember a time,' said Sir George, 'when you went down there for comfort, as you would not to a cold woman. You needed her then.' You need her now, he thought. You need her,—you know it.

Gertrude did. Isabel, lately taken to her bosom, *faute de mieux*, was but wretched consolation. Gertrude was far too clever and complex for Isabel.

'Lise is a nice little thing,' she said soon, again by no distant line of connection. Lise was the latest, on trial in Ernestine's place.

'Lise?—oh, yes. I shall like to see her.' He followed quietly.

'She's come out a lot,' said the Duchess. 'Mark's improved her. More character.'

'Character? Surely she'd plenty before.'

'Not much, I think: very pliable. Easily influenced, for good or evil. Mark's could only be for good.'

'Certainly,' said Sir George, following again. 'You have news of Mark?'

This was happier. Gertrude told him. He was drenched with news of Mark, speculation concerning him, hopes expressed, honours predicted,—all very like old times.

'If Iveagh could do something like that now——' said Sir George: wickedly, we fear.

'It's not in him,' said Iveagh's mother, her face darkening. 'He's weak essentially, and worse. Not to be trusted a moment. He's been drinking again, Adelaide says.'

'Adelaide! My dear Gertrude, I shall have to ask

you to choose your authority, before you quote to me ! Adelaide and Isabel ! Where's yourself ? Where's Wickford ? He told me his brother was better, much.'

'Drinking's on his father's side,' said the Duchess, after a pause, somewhat put out. She had not thought her son would forestall her here.

'What then ? I was not suspecting yours. Only don't you see how much better that makes it ?'

'Better ?'

'To be sure. Granted a grain of inheritance, and that temptation, and a state like that poor lad's these two years. Wick says the struggle's been a stiff one, and I don't doubt it. It isn't as if he hadn't the opportunity to exceed, in your society. It isn't as if he hadn't needed it——'

'Needed ? You amaze me, George.'

'Probably,' said Sir George, moving the tea-things, 'you have never felt the need. I have . . .'

'George !'

'Yes. I thought I'd tell you, before Adelaide spread tales about me. Just lately, Wick says, he seems to have floored it entirely,—turned the other way, and looking low in consequence. On my honour,' said Sir George, twitching the table-cloth, 'I'd been settling to talk to him in an opposite sense. I never did believe in abstaining, suddenly. . . . I won't, if you prefer it.'

The Duchess was amazed. She could hardly get over this easy disposal, by George, of her most haunting shame, in the matter of Iveagh. She had always, round the corner from her husband, backed the cause of abstinence vigorously. Encourage a boy to drink more, when he had dropped it ! It struck her as strange, of George, very, to take such a line. Yet such careless, one-handed routing of her most effective and

well-stored arguments seemed to remind her of something. It revived a certain atmosphere, as her brothers had been unable to do, in Holmer House.

It was good for the Duchess to be over-ridden, by the few people in the world to whom she granted leave to do it, that was the fact.

'It's nice to have a man about the place again,' she said suddenly, at a later period, when her son and her guest had been dawdling about the half-dark hall, smoking and comparing fire-arms, instead of going to their rooms to dress.

'Now I call that hard on Wickford,' remarked Sir George.

XVII

M. DU FRETTAY MEETS A BISHOP

MRS. ELPHINSTONE and M. du Frettay, convinced that the Duchess's dinner-party would be as dull as ditch-water unless they did their best for it, prepared from the outset to take it in hand.

'I shall expect you to assist me,' said Lise, in a general manner, before setting out.

'I shall struggle after,' said Gabriel, looking at her in her last new dress with hopeless delight.

Must we describe it? Dress matters so little on such persons. Lise, inside a friar's frock, inside a Prussian lady's Reformkleid, would have been delightful. She wore straw-coloured silk, lace-draped, and she could bear it, for her smooth sallow skin turned olive at night. The shadows on her *cendré* locks darkened also; the whole of her little head seemed pencilled, shaded, bewilderingly soft. Of old it had been bewilderingly shaggy also, but now Lise did her hair nicely, in deference to her station and Mark. The tints of her draperies were exquisite, like the blending of the fairy-tale dresses of silver and gold. As for lace, her mother's old Limerick could face any Duchess: and so could her diamonds, being the Duchess's gift. It was prettily done of her, Lise asserted, to put them on: whereto, seeing how prettily it was done, her gasping public agreed.

The pair departed on foot, though the Duchess had offered the carriage: but Lise laughed in Wickford's face. The idea of it! The lanes were dry, weren't they? Or if they were not, entirely, in places,—she had yet another pair of shoes. Her dance ones, for instance, though certainly they did not suit her frock so well as the bronze she had on. She asked M. du Frettay's opinion on the point, before departure. Gabriel, whose main temptation, in the matter of the little bronze shoes, was much the same as Iveagh's, of old, in the garden, advised her seriously to keep them,—and as for the muddy places in the lane, he would lay down his cloak.

Lise, who liked this sort of thing, danced along at his side very happily. Compared with other things in life, mud-stains on her shoes mattered very little,—she was not that sort of girl. They entered the state drawing-room at Holmer together, under the soft radiance of many candles, as charming a couple as could have been chosen, from two capitals at least: du Frettay half-smiling, as though foreseeing for Lise the effect she must make.

'Dear me, that is a very fine young fellow,' said the Bishop, benevolently bending his glass. 'I do not seem to remember him.'

The Bishop, it should be said, having haunted Eton twelve years previously, considered that he knew practically everybody of du Frettay's age,—everybody likely to dine at a Duke's table, anyhow. His face fell, when he heard the truth from Wickford. Evidently, so fine a young fellow should have been Eton property; and record-breaking in the air, a risky job, had better have been undertaken under English auspices too. However, the Bishop was

gracious, on hearing that M. du Frettay longed to be presented to him ; nor could the Bishop realise (as Sir George did) for how long this had been M. du Frettay's desire, or wish.

' You're a ripper,—go on,' said the Duke to him *sotto voce*, at least once during the evening : for Wickford, very soon, was mightily tired of his part. Of all the problems with which his mother had ever faced him, this evening was the deadliest,—bad from the start. Adelaide, after their morning ride to town, during which he had held her in her future position, steadily, was waspish and truculent. His aunt and the Honourable Mrs. Courtier were already conveying innuendoes across intervening parties,—the first stage. The Bishop was beaming a very plague of patronage, and clearing his throat in a scholastic manner Wickford remembered, with shrinking ; and Sir George, their lion, the trump-card of the evening,—in the critical preprandial instants, where *was* Sir George ?

' Well, my little boy,' said Sir George quietly, in the shadow of the further room, where another than he was lurking, oddly enough, until the strictest need. Iveagh's back was turned, and his head resting on his hands as he stood by the unused hearth. ' Wick tells me you're better,—I hope it will last.'

' I was never ill,' said Iveagh, dropping an elbow and allowing him a hand. ' To mention,' he added, under the discerning eye.

Sir George, being a skilled wanderer, had more than half a doctor's training, and double most doctors' experience of mortal ills. He was the only person, during the bad time, who had prescribed physically for Iveagh, in the intervals of the moral 'ragging'

which the Duke, lacking the necessary power, had handed him to perform. Sir George was a martinet, at root, as the Duchess had said : when his back was straightened, he had a tremendously sharp tongue. Slating,—slanging,—the real sledgehammer, he was capable of any grade of the process. Yet Iveagh, who had suffered the worst from him, gave his hand without hesitation, surprised in the half-dark and complete absence of spirit as he was.

‘ Sleep, do you ? ’ said Sir George. ‘ Dream less ? ’

‘ I’ve not been dreamin’ lately.’

‘ Dream come true, possibly.’ That was the surgeon, right to the middle of the wound. ‘ Lise,’ he added, ‘ is very pretty to-night.’ He looked through the intervening drapery into the other room, where both could see some of the guests.

‘ She always is,’ said Iveagh.

‘ Right,—I beg your pardon.’ Sir George laughed, for he relished resistance. No sledgehammer methods, he knew, would ever flatten Iveagh ; his elasticity would always slip round, wriggle out, spring up again. He liked the knowledge, which had been throughout the boy’s best hope of safety : it was a useful inheritance from a fighting race. Sir George knew well, better even than Gertrude, how splendid, in all its bearings, that inheritance was. It was under the great Duke’s auspices, under his painted eyes often, as now, that he had ‘ ragged ’ the Duke’s little boy. There was no harm in it, to so deeply sweet and seasoned a nature, under its surface sulks, which were simply racial. Even without Ernestine’s constant reassurance, he would have known there was no harm.

‘ Can you tell me what my fate is, Iveagh ? ’ he said.

‘ I’d sooner be warned.’

‘Dinner, you mean?’ Iveagh told him, or rather, gave him his view of the chances. ‘We,’ he said, had changed pretty often. He said ‘we’ for his mother like Wickford, but not with the same purely respectful intent. ‘It’ll be Addy’s mother, by now,’ he judged. ‘Question was, if you were forward enough.’

‘Forward!’ groaned Sir George.

‘We tossed for a time between you and Wick,’ explained Iveagh. ‘Now you’ve scored, strikes me. It’s your book bein’ out,—his isn’t,—won’t be for years. Did you see Mrs. Redgate comin’ up?’

‘No, we came straight through for once, no stoppages. I hear,’ said Sir George, ‘she’s a niece with her, who has been painting Lise. Is it a good portrait?’

Iveagh conveyed the portrait was decent. He had an idea the girl was bringing it up to-morrow—show mother—so on. If she did not—too frightened—he purposed to go and fetch her. ‘She’s frightened of Uncle Giles,’ he added.

‘Oxborough? Why?—does he tease her?’

‘No—frightened of lookin’ at him somehow. Lookin’ his way.’ He had his completest cave-dwelling gravity, as he peered through the curtains. But it was his own gravity,—his old self.

‘Oh, you’re better, much better,’ thought the friend. ‘Ernestine’s slyer than I thought, though. Can that be her cure?’

Yet he knew it might mean little in the case,—the Suirs had always plenty of girls about. They never reduced their chances of variety, in a life so full of curious interest, by consorting with one sex only, any more than with one class. Iveagh, at his worst, had never abjured feminine society. It was, as one might say, all the same to him.

Things being so promising for health—inward health, for outwardly the boy looked ‘low’ and languid as his brother said,—it was not at all Sir George’s first instinct to torment him with histories of his Magnificence Mark Elphinstone, urged by Lise. It was not anybody’s first instinct to torment Iveagh. Adelaide, urged by jealousy, might enjoy it, or Lise caught in a fine fury of self-purgation, but not sensible, well-poised people like Ernestine and Sir George. We only mention the unremarkable fact that the guest of the evening was unwilling to fall in with any such line of action, as prelude to the less remarkable fact that he succumbed to Lise.

The fact was least remarkable of all, that Mrs. Elphinstone faced him at the Duchess’s table, the while he had at his elbows those ill-wishing cats, Lady Oxborough and Adelaide’s mamma. It was, of course, a highly honourable position; but the main result was that the lion ate little, and said nothing at all. Nothing, at least, of the kind that was to be expected from him.

‘Look,—oh, look at the man!’ almost groaned the Duchess. ‘Wouldn’t you say he was a schoolboy? Why, Wickford was better at school!’

‘Wickford had excellent manners,’ said the Bishop, and began to tell anecdotes of him to which a mother should have attended: but the Duchess could not. How could she? Her worst presentiments were coming to pass: her table, *faute de* George, falling to pieces beneath her eyes. Lise was talking highly treasonable rubbish to Wickford about the Eastern Service, instead of attending to Giles. The Duchess’s dear son Iveagh, to her right, was behaving quite impossibly to the nice girl his mother had found for him, whose use-

fulness in life was manifest by her neglected clothes. Lise was neglected too, to a keen observer : her frock, though good enough, was not put on with that attention to rigid decorum the Duchess would have wished—for Mark. Adelaide was a model to everyone, smartly simple, admirably maided, but not a man of them really heeded her. One and all, Giles, George, even the little wretch du Frettay,—even the Duchess's own Bishop,—they looked towards Lise.

Meanwhile, of course, Lise saved the dinner-table single-handed, and kept three men, at any rate, quite happy in their minds. No one looking at her, or listening, could be sensible of a duty ill-performed to others. In vain the Duke, supported by his aunt, Lady Oxborough, laid subtle siege to the lion at their right hand. Lise, in the act of taking her seat, had smiled across at 'S' George' to cheer him up,—it seemed to have the opposite effect of entrancing him. He endeavoured in vain to look at Adelaide's bepowdered mother, at Isabel's broad face and bovine eyes. Lise was nicer to look at,—she was nicer ! She was wild, wicked, and she was saying true things. Wit and truth about the powers that be, and the powers that never should have been, in India.

'She's right, the girl,' said Sir George, and went off for a time to Isabel. But it was useless : soon, quite soon, his vague appearances showed he was listening again.

Owing to the discomfort of his situation, as has been said, Sir George almost failed to notice his food ; but the wine he could not fail to notice in this house, for Wickford's father's famous cellar merited a strict regard. It was right beyond criticism : it baffled praise, unless a poet's : it incited the connoisseur to dreaming,

—and the practical-minded Oxborough to drinking while others dreamed. Gertrude's wine was one of the reasons why her brothers showed such a clinging preference for her society ; and nothing would induce us to disclose the dodges to which she and her son resorted, to keep them from despoiling her of her best. Such a foundation of things at Holmer was also, as Sir George had said, a temptation to the boys,—or would have been, in his own day. Oddly, the modern custom has turned against it : and the temptation, owing to the strong hand of fashion, is altogether less than it was.

All the same, Suirs were born with the taste, and Sir George looked once or twice, with his long-sighted hunter's glance, across and down the table to Iveagh. Next he turned his attention to Michael serving, but Michael never went near him. It was collaboration, most clearly, and the boy's intention that the company should overlook.

' I *am* so glad,' said Iveagh's useful girl once : and he found her busy blue eyes fixed on the water in his glass.

' Cheek,' thought Iveagh, but of course he did not say it : one never says things like that to useful girls. He attended to her at first in careless Suir fashion, not flirting exactly, but satisfying her greedy spirit, which was greedier, of course, than that of less useful and excellent girls. Her head craned lizard-like while she responded. Iveagh thought, once or twice, how much nicer Bess would have been beside him, chiefly because he could have talked sense to Bess. Chiefly,—there were other things. The way she held her head, upright, not poking eagerly : her beautiful white neck and blue, but very far from busy eyes. The blessing, to be

looked at fully by a girl as Bess did, with eyes that held, and helped, and took you in ; and which then dropped away shyly into private dreams, a private world without any doubt sweet and worthy, a world which any man on earth would want to know. . . . It was strange how this lizard-like creature at his side made him think of Bess, who ought by rights to have been sitting in her chair. . . . He turned his head slightly to Michael, who disturbed him with decanters and a message from Wickford.

‘ Let him go to the deuce,’ said Iveagh, sliding his sleepy eyes sidelong. ‘ And don’t come near me again when I told you not.’

‘ There you are ! ’ said Michael to the other man who had handed him this dangerous duty. ‘ For a week past he will not, and what’s the use of trying to turn him ? ’

‘ He might come round,’ murmured the other man. ‘ He’s wanting it, anyone can see.’

‘ He couldn’t be other than wanting it,’ said Michael scornfully, ‘ after a week. But they’d best let him be, Sir George and his Grace as well. That young lady is fast annoying him.’

‘ Such an *interesting* head,’ said the useful girl, who had been poking in Sir George’s direction. ‘ Doesn’t he remind you of a lion ? ’

‘ I have not much acquaintance among lions—’ began Iveagh.

‘ Answer sensibly,’ said his mother on his other side.

—‘ And if I had,’ proceeded Iveagh, ‘ I’d be wondering which you meant.’

‘ You talk as though there were differences, in animals,’ the useful girl pointed out. Iveagh’s thoughts strayed from her.

'I hear she is wonderfully musical,' said the useful girl, now poking at Mrs. Elphinstone.

'She is,' said Iveagh.

'How nice for him,' said the useful girl.

'Do you know Elphinstone?' said Iveagh, awaking slightly.

'Why of *course*,' said the useful girl. 'I *worked* for him.'

'By the powers, she's fond of Mark!' thought Iveagh. As for what she worked at, he did not think of asking, the other discovery was so much more worth while. Besides, he had no intention himself of engaging her services. Wick might if he liked.

Finally, the lizard turned to his uncle, her other neighbour, and Iveagh was, of course, alone. It was not likely his mother would notice him, in the circumstances. Things in general were too appalling.

He watched the other girls: Lise, bless her, more beautiful than words, throwing the treasures of her wit and well-being into their pitiful stock. With half an ear, all the time, he had heard her sweet pliant tone, the ineffable cadence when the point came, and the sure laugh that succeeded. But he could worship it as well from where he was,—he was not envious of Wick's position. . . . Adelaide, flirting with du Frettay, talking too loud, but that was habitual. It was time, by rights, Addy turned back to the Bishop, and released his mother,—not that he cared, but it was time.

Iveagh watched for the table break to travel round because it amused him,—it was so asinine. Why should not people like Lise, Trenchard, and du Frettay orate, and those listen who wished? Besides, du Frettay would enjoy orating. . . . He was now talk-

ing French to the Courtier-woman: Iveagh liked to see him talking French. He was ripping to see anyhow, fresh and keen beside Addy's mother, whose artificial head was leaning almost to his shoulder,—fooling the poor old goat, no doubt. Du Frettay was a caution with women, fooled the lot. It was hardly fair on some of them. . . .

Dash, how his head was aching! This, with Iveagh, was not an unheard-of evil, and he had a familiar remedy he could drop into his glass at need. He thought of sending Michael for it, and then let it slide again. It would do later. In the act of so thinking, he noticed Adelaide, in the seam of the table-conversation, drop something into her champagne glass, and swallow it hastily. Spurred by the coincidence he stirred, stared across at her face, brilliant,—overheated,—her fine languishing eyes. . . .

'That girl's going after her mother,' reflected the Duchess aloud, she having noted the action at the same moment as he did. She had not meant to speak aloud, but internal worry so produced it.

Drugs, was it? Beastly,—he must warn Wick. That was really Iveagh's only thought about it. As usual, his mind shied willingly from Adelaide, and he prepared to depart elsewhere in spirit again.

'Isn't Poppy a clever girl?' said the Duchess. (Poppy, was she?) 'She took a first-class in Mathematics.'

'Rippin',' said Iveagh. His mother always threw people's classes at him, particularly girls.

'What did she talk about?' said the Duchess.

'Lions, I think,' said Iveagh, who felt, in the circumstances, that he had better not mention Mark.

‘Have you a headache?’ said the Duchess, chiefly because he was so civil.

‘I’ll get through,’ said the boy. His mother glanced at him sharply,—she knew the look of his eyes.

‘You ought to get that Frenchman to teach you English.’ (What had he said now?) ‘Have you got your thing?’

‘I’ve taken it,’ said Iveagh: a lie, but he did not want a fuss.

The Duchess dropped silent, catching a glance from her other son up the table. A new department of inner discomfort stirred, that had not stirred for long. These headaches of Iveagh’s were direct inheritance, though his were worse than his father’s. Some doctor, a friend of George’s, had once told her to watch them: not, as she had at first supposed, in the matter of his school-work, but in other things, emotion, excitability. Emotion! She had a little thrill of wonder, approaching to vulgar curiosity, if that were really what Wickford’s sharp, lingering glance at them had meant. It would be queer indeed if he and George, in their perpetual work and planning for the boy, these three years back, had had that vision behind him. Unsteady, she had called Iveagh to George: unsteady what? Morals, she had supposed. But the brain is different.

The women left at last, but then it was Sir Giles. Giles, being left out of the conversation at the end of the table, spent most of the interlude in teasing his younger nephew for his empty glass, and in re-filling his own. The Duchess might say such temptation was peculiar to her husband’s side, but Oxboroughs drank a good deal: the main difference being that they could stand it, while Suir nature resisted the fumes less

easily. Now, granted comparative solitude,—the Frenchman across the table did not count,—and the Elphinstone girl's recent departure from his other elbow, and the information gleaned from Addy, and improved by jesting with Sam, the chance for a little natural humour at the expense of a boy whom he had never liked, was quite a pretty one. Giles, undiscouraged by du Frettay's sallies for diversion, made the best of his pretty chance : and Iveagh grew whiter and more savage, momentarily.

'You'd better,' hinted du Frettay, snicking one of the decanters. 'That's no harm—it will stop-him-off,—he is stupid.'

'He is,' said Iveagh, in the equal tone of perfect obstinacy.

'You have not sworn off?' argued Gabriel, for he could not conceive it.

'Till Monday.'

'Never!—why?'

'Nothin',—I said I would.'

'To your brother?'

'No.'

Giles broke in with more open baiting, for Sir George had left the table. He was obviously overdoing things in all senses, when the Duke's attention was attracted : and he and the Bishop between them decided that the men should move.

'Well, we'll ask Mrs. Elphinstone,' said Giles, too loud, alluding to something, heaven knows what, that he had lately said.

'I'd like you to,' said Iveagh, expressively.

'Gently, my boy,' said the Bishop, in his second tone, neither pulpit nor society,—something between.

XVIII

THE TALE OF MARK

IT was into this atmosphere of brawl, artificially heated, that the story of Mark's coolness, swiftness and self-devotion, amid the sluicing torrents and slippery muds of the Kashmir rains, eventually fell. But we have to go back a little, for, well managed by Lise, Sir George told the tale of Mark and the mother and baby to an audience of women first.

Lise had leant down to the lion, on her way out, and invited him to come early to the drawing-room ; so Sir George, who was no great smoker, very naturally went. Sir George was weak with girls,—he knew plenty in London. He brought them things, tucked away in corners of his traveller's kit, from opposite ends of the earth. He attended their weddings, sure proof of the true taste, nor did he avoid their nurseries afterwards. He liked them, as he liked young men, as being necessary realities : but he was not obsessed by the vision of cradle-rocking exclusively. He was kind, on the present occasion, to Iveagh's useful girl, who stuttered some of her plans and aspirations to him : he was friendly and flirtatious with Adelaide ; only, having started from Lise he came back to her, and settled down beside her in the sofa-corner, as though for good.

'Drat the man,' said Lady Oxborough to her sister-in-law in confidence. 'There he is now, telling tales

to the Fitzmaurice girl—like anything—no one to hear ! ’

‘ Who’s he speaking of ? ’ said the Duchess, who had caught fragments.

‘ Mark.’

‘ Speak up,’ said Lise to her companion. ‘ They all know him here,—they’re all wanting to listen to you. Tell it out loud.’

So Sir George told it out loud, and beautifully. It was a very fine story, he thought himself, so he failed it at no point. It was of general interest too, as Lise said, for even Mrs. Courtier had known Mark. Lise herself had only picked up the bare bones of the incident from the Elphinstones. The Duchess knew what Mark had chosen to tell her, which went for naught. But Sir George, by a charming coincidence, had been on the scene. ‘ Tied by the leg,’ as he put it, which seemed to mean lamed in a hunting accident, and a few bones broken, he had lived in Mark’s half-drowned village for several weeks. His fleshly eye had seen him leap into the yellow torrent, his fleshly ear had heard the woman’s scream as the group of three were hurled against the bridge. Facts seen, noted by an orderly explorer in his journal the same evening,—even the cunning young Captain could hardly escape from that.

‘ Pretty good,’ said Isabel, *en route*, to Gertrude. ‘ A brown woman, too,—eh ? ’ But she got no answer. Gertrude, of course, was soft about Mark. Adelaide was thoughtful, seeming sleepy, or sulky : Mrs. Courtier picking at the bangles on her wrist. Heroism, yes : even the poorest of us know what that is : and modest heroes, in England : and the tribute eloquently paid by each to each. . . . As for Iveagh’s little useful girl, it was as well he was there no longer to observe

her : for she was trembling, crying very nearly, before the close. Had she not worked for that hero once, and had he not ignored her, civilly, from first to last, in the manner girls of her devoted kind love best ? Iveagh's instinct was right, such mementoes were worth more than mathematical first-classes to Miss Poppy ; and having no immediate Mark to worship, she fixed her worship—a little too eagerly—upon Sir George.

Well, all he had got to do now,—so Sir George understood from Mrs. Elphinstone,—was to say it all over again, just like that, among the men-folk. The very same words would do. She wanted Wickford to hear particularly, he was so fond of him. And Iveagh. . . .

‘ I see,’ said Sir George. He seemed to be considering.

‘ You’ll find it come easy, the second time,’ encouraged Lise.

‘ To be sure,’ said Sir George : but he still pondered.

‘ And you’ll point the moral,’ said Lise, preening her gold and silver plumage. Mark, well polished-up by people who really knew his possibilities, was something to have.

‘ I’m not sure what the moral is,’ said Sir George. ‘ That any man, granted the sight, would not have done as much ? Because really——’

Lise looked upon him reproachfully, trying to steal her best feathers like that ! ‘ The point’s not what any man would have done, but what any man *has*, at the same age,’ she said severely.

‘ Ah.’ Sir George reckoned. ‘ Your husband was nearly twenty-five.’

‘ Oh, bother you, don’t be so pedantic,’ giggled Mrs. Elphinstone. ‘ Do you deny it was a thing of beauty he did ? Or that he was very young to be where he

was at the time, alone and unassisted? Well,—point that.'

'Yes, but our boy's poor,—he's denuded. And the Duchess did assist Mark, between ourselves. And suppose,' said Sir George, 'in two years' time, ours was——'

'Well, he won't be,' said Lise. 'Except for your and my intervention in his upbringing at this point,—and then he will.'

Sir George considered again, both elbows on his knees, gazing at the floor between them with his hands to his temples: an odd position for flirting, but perhaps he wished to conceal from Gertrude that he was.

'About my own intervention in his upbringing, Lise,' he said. 'I feel quite confident, up to the present. About yours——'

'Oh, do be quiet with you,' gurgled Lise. 'Do you want her to hear?' (This was the useful girl, opposite.) 'I've been feeling so nice and easy myself about it all, thanks to Ernestine. Now you go——'

'What does Gabriel think?' said Sir George. Lise stiffened.

'I have not asked him, this time. I have no need, on every occasion under the sun, of hearing M. du Frettay's ideas.'

'I see.' Sir George got up, at leisure. 'Very well, Lise, I leave you. I might be giving you some more of mine, if I stayed. Then I mayn't even employ Gabriel as assistant, among the men-folk? You know, I might want drawing out.'

'Oh, Wickford'll draw you,' said Lise carelessly. 'Isn't it what he's been trying to do, the entire evening?'

'Has he?' The lion looked surprised.

‘Now don’t go pretending not to know it,’ said Lise. The lion looked conscious.

‘What do you suppose,’ said Lise, ‘you are here for?’ The lion looked more conscious than ever, gazing down.

‘What do you suppose,’ murmured Lise, leaning back her cinder-coloured head, ‘would happen in a place like this if I kissed you? Presently,—when you’ve said your task?’

The lion said nothing, but he looked at the temptress. Eyes met,—it was a bargain. Miss Poppy, that useful member of society, was ashamed of Lise.

Sir George, as a matter of fact, had no need of drawing out, in the unmixed society of the men-folk: especially when some such amalgamating process was badly required.

Even for a Holmer situation, the situation later on that night in the smoking-room was a stiff one,—it touched the serious, indeed. The Bishop, trying in a professional manner to control Sir Giles, was not behaving very wisely. Wickford was ‘sick’ with the Bishop, and worn with an anxious evening, the weight of which, naturally, had fallen upon him. Iveagh, sicker than he was, and with even better cause, was too obstinate to save the position and solve his brother’s problem by retreat, which was really the only way.

So Sir George, waking to a real need, told stories, with Gabriel to assist: for Gabriel still lingered with the house-party. Friendship only detained him, since Lise was stopping for the night at Holmer: friendship, and the desire, like Sir George, to offer the young host a helping hand.

Neatly prompted by Gabriel, who knew, by means of the lion's books, and his own father's stories, most of the background of that remarkable career, Sir George told many things, feats by field and flood, good things and evil things and merely funny ones, that had struck him in his experience; and the Bishop beamed resplendent on the pride of England, and the burly Ox-borough Giles grew silent by degrees. These were stories for men, no doubt of it. He looked at the traveller's wiry form and brown face, ever more attentively, as the recital went on. Trenchard was given, Giles gathered from Gertrude, to interfering at Holmer, and he differed perpetually, in what he said and thought, from Oxborough fixed ideas. Still, apart from saying and thinking, he had actually accomplished a thing or two. For all his cranks, he was a fellow worth knowing, worth quoting even in the proper places,—Isabel was right.

'Fore George,' swore Giles, of the Mark story, just like Isabel. 'That's not bad. That's as good as I've heard, for a young fellow. A brown woman too. . . . I'd never have thought it of that one, either,' he pushed on weightily, the company and his nephews granting him leave. 'Not but what he was good stuff, Mark,—but he thought too much of himself; I always thought him, between ourselves, a bit of a prig.'

'So did I, between ourselves,' said Sir George. 'And so did Wickford.'

'Well, he was,' apologised Wickford, who could have produced plenty of other Mark stories, of a different nature, if required.

'He was not,' said Iveagh, as usual. It was as though Iveagh could not hear an opinion pronounced by three people in turn without making

one against them. One to three, a sufficient Suir minority.

‘Now then, water-drinker,’ gibed his uncle. ‘You’d have avoided water-drinking, on that occasion, I suppose.’

‘I dare say I would,’ said Iveagh, turning whiter.

‘It’s my idea any of us would have jumped——’ began Sir George.

‘It’s my idea none of us would,’ murmured Iveagh.

‘Speak for yourself,’ ruffled Giles. ‘Mean I should not, or Wickford?’

‘The question is,’ proceeded Sir George, ‘if we should have come out again. It was the cleverness got me, more than the courage, which is commoner——’

‘Not so common as you think, Trenchard,’ said Giles. ‘You’d naturally make a mistake on the point——’

‘Let’s hear the end, Trenchard,’ said the Bishop.

Sir George, striving against the spirit of brawl, tried to finish his story. The beauty of it, in his own view, was still to come, in Mark’s ingenious extrication of the trio from a terribly tight place. The fact of prompt leaping, granted a mother and child in danger, whether brown, yellow or white, seemed to him a commonplace. It could not seem so to Giles, who, though plucky enough, did nothing instantly. The Oxboroughs were ‘good men,’ in the popular phrase, but, given a Kashmir river in full flood, the crucial minute would have passed by several seconds, by the time Giles jumped. He would have lost three lives (to do him justice) rather than saved two, on the occasion. That was the difference, shortly formulated, between Oxborough Giles and Elphinstone Mark.

For the moment the point he dimly chased, for the

purpose of Iveagh's teaching, was more to this Ox-borough. He scored it successfully.

'You'd have gone in on top, to save Elphinstone, wouldn't you? That's the kind of thing we expect from you.'

The remark fell on silence,—horrified silence. The Duke stiffened,—Iveagh stared. So Sir Giles pushed on, for their benefit, making it clear.

'Granted a pretty wife in the background——'

'Look out, Wick,' said Sir George quickly: but it was Gabriel who arose. 'Just beg the boy's pardon, will you, Oxborough? It was a stupid thing to say.'

'Oh, he needn't bother,' said Wickford, gazing at the floor. His mother's brother had reached the limit now, and the Duke, so to speak, retired. Still, stinkin' pride, dating back several centuries before Oxboroughs were invented, enveloped Wickford like a garment. Iveagh beyond him had made one violent movement, but like his brother's, it had come to naught, though for a different reason. The shock of anger had precipitated the revolt of his nerves,—fortunately. He remained rigid, helpless to all appearance, breathing a little short, his eyes distracted with physical pain, as,—Sir George would have thought,—the most fuddled ass could see.

'R—right!' said du Frettay softly. He had laid aside his cigar, and his grasp on Iveagh's arms seemed rather to encourage than to control. His serene balance in all situations was a blessing, not for the first time,—a man who always kept his head.

'What?' said Sir Giles, still groping for his lost point. 'Why, he's been a fool about the girl for ages, Addy told us. Been avoiding temptation all the week,—give you my word for it,—liquor as well.'

'You have not, my friend,' said the Bishop, and cleared his throat. He was an Eton Bishop, and liked the boys. Giles (not that it mattered at all) was Harrow.

'Just listen,' said Sir George, an eye on Gabriel and Iveagh, about whom he was uncertain equally. 'Elphinstone was not married, at the time I'm talking of, nor even engaged. These boys have always been friends with him, haven't you, Wick? Iveagh spoke for him lately——'

'Mark can do without our speakin',' said Wickford.

'Just so,—a good man. We all, I think, grant it. Anyone counter?' ('Ahem!' said the Bishop, moved.) 'Well now, Oxborough——'

'Not likely I should beg his pardon, is it?' said Sir Giles, almost pathetic. 'Boy like that,—till he can show me as good.'

'Must we have examples?' asked Sir George, surprising him again. 'Wick, will you oblige us?'

'No,' said Wickford.

'Gabriel,—off the ground? Will you give us a testimonial?'

'No,' said Gabriel.

Sir Giles looked about him, open-mouthed. Fetching in the Frenchman, were they? What in the name of—*off* the ground?

'*Off* the ground, Oxborough,' said Sir George unkindly, 'and not in the water,—one better than Mark.'

'Ahem!' said the Eton Bishop, getting there. He became amused.

'I should be extr—remely happy,' said M. du Frettay, with a singular gleam of his blue eyes, 'any time he is at liberty, to conduct Sir Giles.'

'What?' said Giles. 'Where?' He gaped yet

more at the young man's expressive gesture,—upwards, to the empyrean. He was a very dramatic young man, painfully so. Everybody in the room was now looking at Giles attentively, earnestly,—even the Bishop. What was the sense of it? What were they all playing at? It was like a nightmare.

'Should you care to follow your nephew,' explained the French young man, in a mild tone, and excellent English. 'I am qualified to assist, I assure you. Tenez—' he passed a card.

A card,—worse and worse. That used to stand for a challenge. What outlandish tricks were these? Giles groped for a solution, regarding it. It had a name printed, the young man's name, and letters after; or rather words, shortened up, with stops between. The name of a new society,—very new. Ass. Aer. . . . *Aer!*

There is an expression, in Gabriel's language, called 'raising the heart,' which does not mean that exactly. It stands for a sensation from which none of us, even the bravest, are exempt, especially after a large meal, when faced with some material disturbance. Sir Giles, on this occasion, had dined well: he loathed the sea always: but he would sooner, any day, have entered a Channel boat than a lighter-than-air boat, even the commonest dirigible. As for a heavier-than-air—Something rose in him, a little lower than the heart, while he strove with the mystic words on Gabriel's card. His complexion showed it. He was, however, getting to the facts, though painfully,—when he discovered everybody laughing! Everybody, the boy Iveagh too. This finished Giles, for, having himself scored the jest of the evening, what was there for them to be amused at?

'Drop it, du Frettay,' said the Duke, gathering himself out of collapse, from many causes. 'Oh, Lord, you're a caution!—and let the kid go, he's all right. Have some whisky, Iveagh, and don't be a little ass——'

'I will not,' said Iveagh: but he looked better, far, for du Frettay's happy diversion. Such a man for ideas! It did him more good than whisky, or brandy either. If they could,—if they only *could*, in combination, manage it. . . . He kept hold of du Frettay's arm, lovingly, though du Frettay had long let go of him.

'I'll have a drop, when they're gone,' he murmured in strict confidence, protected by the general move outward to the stairs.

'Good child,' said Gabriel, in his own tongue, approving: and picked up his cigar again.

'Very neat, young man, on my word,' said the Eton Bishop, a hand on his shoulder, as he passed to the door.

'Talk of extrication from tight places——' murmured Sir George, as he passed in turn.

'Your Church is not half-bad,' said Gabriel to Wickford, having saluted the Bishop. 'I am gratified to have met it——'

'Don't go by that,' said Wickford, hastily. 'Thanks, I say. What on earth we'd have done without you—' He laughed hopelessly again. 'Good night.'

'After all,' resumed du Frettay in French to Iveagh, dealing capably with the drinks when they were solitary. 'Whoever it was you promised could not have reckoned on a provocation like that.'

'No, she could not,' agreed Iveagh, dreamily watching him. Such sense in the man, too,—one had happily no need of the effort of thought in his society.

‘And to think,’ ejaculated du Frettay, pushing across the glass he had prepared, ‘that the hands are tied, in your country ! Sacr-r-r——’

‘They were,’ said Iveagh.

‘I don’t mean that. It need not have been you, in any case. Nor your brother, for that matter. In the case of an uncle,’ said Gabriel with a reminiscence, ‘the Prayer Book forbids it——’

‘It’s not the Prayer Book,—that’s marryin’,’ said Iveagh, who understood French very well, though he did not often choose to speak it. ‘I say,’ he confided, at a later stage, with his eyes shut. ‘That was a fairly rippin’ thing about Mark.’

XIX

THE WORST OVER

THE Suir brothers had a veiled debate the following morning, on the subject of Miss Ryeborn's coming to Holmer : interesting as character to anyone who knew them, but certainly not interesting in anything it betrayed to the world at large. It happened in Wickford's sanctum during the peaceful period of the morning while the Bishop was looking about for people to take to church. Iveagh proposed, in the formula known to them, that Wick should lay himself out to please the girl, spare her the sight of his uncle, and have her to tea comfortably in his private room. Wickford conveyed in the same language that he thought his mother, with Addy actually in the house, would not stand it. Iveagh adumbrated that it could not matter if she did not. She deserved it,—he sketched that also. Wickford thereupon turned his back completely,—it had been only half-turned hitherto,—and let fall the general idea that he ought to get some writing done, and if Iveagh had any relics of decency he would free his hands for the afternoon, and see to the girl himself. Iveagh sniffed at this, suggesting he had meant to do something quite different ; however, Wickford grasped he might condescend to something of the sort if, before three o'clock, Wick saw no other way out of the hole.

Other people besides his brother found Iveagh a handful that Sunday ; for, though he walked down to Hatchways with Sir George in the afternoon, confided him to Mrs. Redgate, and carried off Bess, all in very capable style, Sir George's early remarks to his hostess were in no sense flattering to him. Sir George remained for some time after landing at Hatchways insensible of the honour lately done him,—anything but obliged.

'He's a young cub,' said Sir George. 'He's as surly as a hedgehog, all spikes. I can't do anything with him. He can go where he likes, for me.' Ernestine smiled. 'All very well your laughing,' said Sir George, 'but I haven't the time to waste he seems to think. I let him know it was yes or no to come with me yesterday, by Wickford. Take it or leave it, hey ? Perhaps that was unwise.' Ernestine looked serious. 'Anyhow I can't change my habits all in a moment for a young—ruffian's crotchets. That's the way I do business, and he'd better know.'

'Of course,' said Ernestine. 'Is the sun worrying you ?'

'Lord no, I love it. Wonderful weather,—wonderful to be here at last,—where were we ? Yes,—well, to-day I led off with soft-sawder, persuading. Perhaps that was unwise again. Anyhow my lord had his nose in the air, looking about, not taking any, for a good half of the way. About the Lodge,' said Sir George, 'I lost my temper and said—personally I could do without him very well. Then he turned pleasanter, if you call it so, and let me know he wouldn't be sorry, granted he could be certain of being free. *Free!* . . . So I said, perhaps a little testily, what the—what on earth did he propose to do, then. And blest,' said Sir George, indignantly, 'if he hadn't got another post up his

sleeve,—paid post,—African too,—it gave me quite a shock !’

‘ Is that the Morocco one ? ’ said Ernestine.

‘ You’re in it, are you ? Ah,’ said Sir George, concentrating, ‘ but I know who’s at the bottom of that. The place showed me. Only if the du Frettays think they’re going to come their paid posts over me, they’re mistaken. You can tell him so. Morocco indeed ! Why, it’s the place of all places I want to go back to myself ! The idea of that little beggar . . . Anyhow, I let Iveagh know. I don’t propose,’ said Sir George firmly, ‘ to be cut out by the du Frettays at this time of day. So I took a kind of racy line with the youngster—you know—ragging him hard about paid work and the peerage. I suppose he’d drop his title ? ’—He diverted to her of a sudden.

‘ Nothing would induce him,’ said Ernestine, dimpling again. She was very happy, shyly delighted, to have her lion at last, and her young looks showed it.

‘ Oh, Lord,—well, I shall never get to the bottom of them ! Anyhow I ragged my nastiest, and he took it as usual. Never knew a boy with a nicer temper really—ahem !—because, after all, it isn’t his fault. Neither peerage nor poverty either,—he’d every right to be independent two years back. . . . And so,’ finished Sir George, ‘ we got to Hatchways gate.’

‘ And after that ? ’ said Mrs. Redgate, removing the Pickle, like a burr, from the best velvet sofa cushion.

‘ Well, there isn’t much time after that, is there ? However, I gathered my lord’d come, on certain conditions. Now,’ said Sir George, suddenly mild, ‘ I had an impression, if I took an inexperienced lad along to Zanzibar, I should make the conditions myself.’

‘ I should think so ! ’ said Ernestine : just as she

had once said—‘The idea!’ Absently, as she spoke, she removed the Pickle from the velvet cushion a second time. He was strictly not allowed there, even by Bess.

‘Well, as to his conditions,—not that I should adopt them,—the chief is, to keep it dark till the end, if he consents, from his relations. Well—that’s Giles, I gather, after last night.’

‘Gertrude too,’ said Ernestine.

‘No! But why should he keep things dark from Gertrude? What’s up there, hey? What’s she been doing that he should speak, or not speak, of her as he does?’ Mrs. Redgate shook her head merely, looking despondent. ‘But I will know,’ challenged Sir George. ‘She’s my oldest friend, and I care for her. She used to be as anxious as we were, surely she was! Wasn’t she? Why wasn’t she? It’s only she likes Wick best,—not much wonder. The boy’s trying, at times. Cross as a little crab to-day.’

‘They both can be,’ said Ernestine, once more displacing the persistent Pickle. ‘Then you have to manage them backwards. . . . Often it means he’s not been well.’

‘Does it? Backwards,’ said Sir George after a pause. ‘Yes, that’s what it comes to. Only it isn’t hard to do, with either of them. Is it? Being the kind they are.’

Having so answered the first part of her remark, he waited, thinking. So did Ernestine. And while the persons in the room were thus absorbed, the Pickle sprang silently upon the velvet cushion again. Being thus easily victorious,—for he would have jumped back thirty-nine times if necessary,—the Pickle curled his grey paws under his chest, and watched them, not

malicious, but benignly blinking. For it was not possible to his nature to believe, having his present will and finding comfort, he should ever be disturbed again.

‘That’s a pretty creature,’ said Sir George pensively. ‘By the way, you know, that’s another bother, with Gertrude. Health,—I’d an idea you still went to a boy’s mother for a testimonial as to that. What’s she doing having boys otherwise? It’s important.’

‘It’s essential,’ said Ernestine.

‘She talked to me,’ said Sir George, folding his arms, ‘about the schoolmistress. It seems, she’s been having a sore throat.’

‘Yes,—laryngitis,’ said Ernestine. ‘Poor Renie.’

‘Confound her, what does her throat matter?’

‘A good deal,’ said Ernestine, ‘to the children. She wants her voice all the time. Iveagh doesn’t need his head at a dinner-party half so much——’

‘He did before the evening was out,’ said Sir George. ‘Oh, by the way, you know all that? Who’s been gabbling,—Gabriel? Of course it was! I’d uncommonly have liked to knock the sot down when he insulted them,’ said Sir George. ‘However, we all did our duty by Gertrude, and Gabriel cleared the score. Did he tell you that? Of course he did! I say,—do you like Gabriel?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought you would,’ said Sir George, contented. ‘So does she.’ Pause. The intervals, of course, were well-filled, at Hatchways. In fact, talking fast as Sir George had been doing, he had really been wasting time. Now he spent it wisely, looking about him, the while the tea entered left centre, and Mrs. Redgate tracked her late thoughts through to an end.

‘Wonderful this is,’ he said again. ‘Nice the garden

looks. Same old china. Rather a dreadful lot of people up there, you know.' He resumed. 'Well, aren't you going to tell me anything?'

'About Gertrude? I'd rather not.'

'He's not offended her,—the little lad? Said what he thought too freely? Chaffed her? Cheeked her? Come on!'

'I hardly know,' she said. 'Very likely.'

'Don't you see her? Don't you see them together?' pursued Sir George. 'Ernestine—I beg your pardon——'

'Why not?' she said with a smile.

'I never have, to your face. However, if you don't mind it.—Are you finished with Gertrude? I ask for her sake. Really broken? She hinted it.'

'I hardly know,' she said again, looking conscious, and unhappy. 'If she hinted it, I suppose it is so. There's been some misunderstanding, over the children; but I can't, at least at present, put it right. I'm sorry I can't,—think I could really, if she'd ever let me come near enough,—but that's it,' said Ernestine.

'Ha! That's it with Wickford too. Manner—mannerism—it distresses him. I've seen it.'

'I think she distresses Iveagh worse,' said Ernestine. 'I think she must have done it, long ago, past bearing. Quite long, when he was little. I doubt, now, if she will ever get him back.' She lowered her head. 'I doubt if she wants to.'

'Ha! You know, I feared it.'

There was silence anew. Neither of these two persons owned children, but there they were, quite in agreement as to how mothers should behave. Perhaps the Pickle was satirical, really, as he blinked at them,—or simply soporific, one can never know.

‘Odd, for a woman,’ said Sir George. ‘Yet it happens, naturally. Or unnaturally. Anyhow, it occurs. . . . I say, one would have thought she would have been interested, such a romance as he’s had! And, though I say it, such a heroine! Does she realise Lise?’

‘Not as Iveagh does. Nor Wick either, for that matter.’

‘Little Lise. . . . They’re jolly nice lads. But I say,’ said Sir George, who was boyish in this company, ‘you’d have thought a woman would be *interested*, wouldn’t you? Common interest. After all, she’s had her romance.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Ernestine. ‘But then, she liked the hero.’

‘But this one’s like that one. Isn’t he?’

‘Perhaps that’s why.’

‘Ernestine, that’s a dark saying.’ She dimpled again, in her sweet fashion, and leant sidelong, one elbow on the couch. Since he was being a boy, she was a girl too, for the moment, her attitude showed it. ‘Oughtn’t she to like him better, because he’s like her hero,—because he really is.’

‘One weakness in a life is enough for Gertrude.’

‘You never mean she’s ashamed of it! No, look here, really, that’s too hard. . . . Besides, there’s Mark,—she was weak about him. Ah, now I’ve done you,’ resumed Sir George after a minute. ‘What about that? Why Mark in front of her own boys? Why the *devil* Mark?’

‘Oh, stop examining me! She cared for Mark like a protégé,—like a production. It’s not a bit the same.’

‘You care for Iveagh like a production,’ said Sir

George, gazing immutably at her. 'Like a protégé anyhow, you must. Is he your Mark?'

'Goodness no! Poor boy.' She laughed suddenly. 'It's only he would hate it so,' she explained.

'You don't make an idol of him,—a model?'

'Goodness no,—how could anybody?' Pause, while she watched the blue dragon china, the smile dying on her face.

'Ernestine,' challenged Sir George, 'you never cared for the Captain.'

'I didn't much,' said Ernestine shamelessly. She added—'He may have improved.'

'No, no. Lise has improved. You ask Gertrude.'

'Pish!' said Mrs. Redgate's expression at the blue dragons,—it really did. Sir George observed the expression contentedly. He often wondered if it was Ernestine who was Hatchways, or Hatchways Ernestine. He now decided it was Ernestine who was Hatchways,—her face was so full of character,—originality, one might almost say. And it may have been the charming attitude, but she seemed to him very young.

'Haven't you got a model young man?' he chaffed her. 'Can't you show as good as Gertrude? Come now,—at your age!'

She remained silent, still gazing, though the colour just dawned in her face. Mark indeed! . . . Then she raised herself from her elbow rather quickly, for the Hatchways gentlemen came in at the door.

'Tiens, le malin!' exclaimed the younger of the Hatchways gentlemen; and before he realised it, the Pickle was raised, cushion and all, swung about, and projected like a bomb off his throne through the window into the garden. Thus did M. du Frettay disclose

at once his deep knowledge of the rules of that household, and his care for Mrs. Redgate's property ; and thus, not for the first time, was the Pickle made aware of French impulsiveness, vigilance, and determination, —which he loathed, because they resembled his own. Twice he walked round the garden, shaking his tail in bitterness of spirit : twice he swore eternal enmity to all things French :—before he saw a sparrow and forgot about it.

Meanwhile, peace began to be patched up on Holmer terraces, all unaware to these debaters. And how ? How, but by way of the schoolmistress's sore throat.

Bess told the Duchess, shyly, that owing to poor Renie, who was nearly at the end of her resources, Ernestine had persuaded that conscientious young woman to give the children a whole morning off 'on Tuesday, and take them out for the day, provided always the weather remained like this. Renie, that very morning after church, had gone under to Bess's counsel and coaxing. She had agreed, on condition, first, that the parents were warned : and second, that the whole of this delightful and exceptional holiday should be known to her flock as Nature Study.

The Duchess listened charmed,—literally charmed,—to Miss Ryeborn's recital. The whole thing bore the badge of Renie, the hall-mark of her practised utility, so plainly. It may have been partly owing to Wickford's absence, but the Duchess began, during the dialogue, to think Miss Ryeborn rather a pretty girl. She also, for the sake of her resemblance to Ernestine, forgave Ernestine another stage, though there was still much, very much, to be explained between them.

Next Bess, yet more shyly, wondered if the Duchess would be at liberty to come with them ?

Well, no,—she could not promise that, precisely. She had ‘ things ’ on Tuesday, she had ‘ people.’ Still, for all her things and people, towards such a laudable object as Nature Study, the Duchess was gracious, granting what she could. The run of the park was as nothing, that was dropped absently, while she looked about for means of more material helpfulness. So seeking, her maternal eye fell on Iveagh, and at once she offered him. His knowledge of plants——

General mirth, to her surprise, greeted the suggestion. Even the Bishop laughed, himself an instructor in the past. The Ryeborn girl laughed, though she coloured simultaneously. Iveagh allowed himself nearly a whole smile. His mother had seldom made such a good joke in his memory, so she needed to be encouraged.

‘ So fond of the kiddies, aren’t you, Iveagh ? ’ jested Adelaide.

‘ Help the school-marm,’ jested Sam. ‘ Chances are, those kids know more than you.’

‘ They know a perfectly terrible amount,’ said the Ryeborn girl.

‘ Irene is an excellent teacher,’ said the Duchess.

‘ Sam shall tell ’em about birds,’ said Iveagh, pleasantly extending his mother’s helpfulness. ‘ We won’t let on he uses ’em to make holes in. Wick shall tell ’em about—snails. No, he can’t. About——’

Fish,—fossils,—architecture, were suggested as subjects for Wickford by a frivolous world. Iveagh denied his knowledge of the former, and— ‘ There isn’t any,’ said Sam, of the last.

‘ No architecture in the park, Sam ? ’ cried Mrs. Elphinstone. ‘ What about the Belvedere ? ’

The Duchess strove against the tide of frivolity, making sensible suggestions. She proposed a place not far from the Belvedere, where there was a camp and shed used of old for holiday picnics. The shed was broken down, but it would provide a shelter in case of rain. Her spirit, from Holmer, would watch over them. She would send a tarpaulin, a tea-kettle if necessary. No, tea would be too late for Renie. Deep within her, owing to this link of Renie, the Duchess began to long to go down to Hatchways, and see Ernestine about it. Girls were so little good. . . . However, she made the best of Bess. She was shy, the Duchess was pleased to note, in Holmer company ; and what was more, she did not, in any uncomfortable degree, remember things.

About and around the pair, the dropping fire of unpractical commentary proceeded. The subject, for a Sunday, was good enough. Lady Oxborough had produced the disturbing theory that architecture was not Nature Study. The Bishop, in his Sunday mood, contributed that the proper study of mankind was man, and our monuments were chiefly to be valued as reflecting the hand that made them. Lise said that the Bishop had not seen the Belvedere, or he could never be so hard on his fellow-creatures. Sam required merely to know if Mrs. Redgate was giving the feed ; because if so, he and Iveagh would come along and study the nature of it, willingly.

In fact, everybody got such facts and such fun out of the situation as they required. As for rendezvous, the Belvedere itself sufficed as an objective. In a forest-ring of half a mile from that blameless erection, given a squeaking pack of kids, the gentlemen, if they chose, could find the party easily. It is probable, but for the food, and the girls, Iveagh and Sam would have avoided

the occasion, which was too like a school-treat to move their taste. Even as it was, they were too wise to promise. With the weather like this, they might be wanted in quite another direction. Still, they were young, and picnics (such as Mrs. Redgate manages) have their points. Renie, whatever Lise might say of her, had her points as well. As for Miss Ryeborn, Sam at least put her under Mrs. Redgate's wing, and was quite incapable of saying a rude or critical word about her. Added to which, Sam was entirely and utterly prostrated, that afternoon, by the portrait of Lise.

Iveagh, in default of Wick, who remained rigidly in retirement, did all that was expected of him, as he could quite well at need. He dodged his mother and his uncle, had a restricting hand on Sam, Mrs. Courtier, and the Bishop,—though Lise helped him ably in the latter case,—and he gave the three girls on his premises (for, of course, Addy counted) entertainment, food, flirtation behind the Bishop's back, and a very nice time. Nobody, in short, could have complained of him seriously : which really, in the Sunday afternoon atmosphere of Holmer, steeped and re-steeped in varnish of all sorts, was creditable. Iveagh reckoned it up himself as 'about right' when Lise, with all her pretty remembered airs and gestures, took to the piano-stool finally : and when his mother, of all miraculous symptoms of serenity and slackness, went to sleep.

About when the light failed, Iveagh came in from the stable, where he had been 'tucking up' Emer, and returned to Wickford's study, whence he had issued primed to represent him, in the first hours of the day. He broke in carelessly in his manner, and finding a nice fire,—things were apt to be very complete and tasteful in his quarters premises towards the dinner hour,—

he collapsed into the chair alongside, and lay pensive, reviewing his feat of arms.

‘Got a minute?’ said the lordly author: it being obvious by Iveagh’s attitude that he had several.

‘No,’ said Iveagh, suspecting figures: however, he soon held out his hand. On and off he had helped a good deal in that book’s compilation. It was particularly uninteresting, to any but the economical expert, but Wickford loved it. Iveagh allowed for his love, though his own book, one of these days, was going to be a better thing. Nor would he slave Wick to do sums for him, when he was sleepy after stable-work,—no chance! For the time, being wanted, he gave the statistical pages his attention, and checked results with a beautifully sharpened pencil, handed him by Wick.

‘Did you get through, out there, without scrappin’?’ his Grace asked presently.

‘We did,’ said Iveagh. ‘She played.’

‘She’ was Lise, naturally: no one else played. That she had done so was good hearing, to Wickford, for she did not always consent. It needed the mood: but he supposed the mood of imminent parting from Hatchways was favourable. When Iveagh said ‘played,’ he meant playing. That was a thing that passed time and saved tempers as well, real ‘playing’ from Lise.

‘It was kind of her,’ said Wickford gravely. ‘Did she not sing?’

His brother shook his head. At the end of the column he remarked—

‘She says that’s gone to glory, nowadays. She says she keeps her singin’ for Mark.’

Wickford whistled, leaning back. ‘She ought not,’ he observed, ‘to say things like that in public.’

'It's nothin' to Mother,' said Iveagh, dreamily, 'if Mark has the ear of an elephant. Granted a good moustache on the man, it's nothin' to her.'

An interlude of respective industry ensued. Iveagh, on the whole, was the more industrious. Wickford began to prefer talking. The Duke had had a prolonged period of unusual quietness that day, of real privacy such as was his right, so he had been missing Iveagh's interruption, for some time before it came. Iveagh was always interrupting others, being lawless. He spent his life in it. One side of Wickford liked peace, respect, and stateliness : the other enjoyed Iveagh and variety.

His inviting attitude had no effect on 'the kid,' who was now pencilling things all about the place, on the back of one of Wickford's magazines. He liked playing with figures, by nature : only he looked weary and pallid still, and it occurred to Wick that such games, though useful, are trying to the brain.

'Did you see the girls home?' he asked : meaning the two Elizabeths, bound for Hatchways.

'I did not,' said Iveagh, after the usual interval. He added, as he noted a total—'To mention.'

'Till where did you take them?' said Wickford, letting his language go. After all, he had been composing excellent sentences for hours.

'To the trees,' said Iveagh. 'After that, they did not need my squiring—and they let me know it.'

'Indeed,' said Wickford, curious. 'What did she say?'

'She said they wished to talk of me, which they're welcome,' said Iveagh, occupied.

No question again which that 'she' was. Wickford smiled. Iveagh in the chair was smiling also, or nearly ; he did not quite set it free.

‘That little beggar, she says the first thing,’ murmured the Duke, digesting by degrees his entertainment.

‘Mark’ll have suffered from that,’ said Iveagh: and then yawned, and covered his eyes with his hand. ‘Tschah, that’s wrong,—oh, the devil’s in it,’ was his next remark.

Wickford got up, with decision. ‘Drop it, kiddy,’ he said briefly, in his English tone, and extended a hand.

‘What for?’ said Iveagh, hanging on to the papers.

‘What for you like,—I want my property.’

‘Let you sit down,’ advised Iveagh pleasantly, and corrected three of the figures on the page.

‘What did the other girl say when you left them?’ said Wickford a little later, when he had sat down as directed, and shortly after, got all his papers back. He managed Iveagh,—or the other way, whichever it was, like that. One yielded to win, with him, invariably, having been careful first to define a clear position. It was not hard, as Sir George said, especially to another Suir nature. Wickford learnt how to do the trick with his handful of a brother before he was twelve: his mother had never learnt yet, at fifty.

‘I forget,’ Iveagh answered his question, with obvious untruth. He looked at Wickford’s beautiful pencil, which he then stored away in his pocket. ‘She said,’ he observed slowly, ‘that I had better rest.’

‘Rest?’

‘It was the word. I thought it strange of the girl.’

‘You having walked to Hatchways and back once during the day,’ said Wickford, in rapid satire.

‘She knows nothing of my doings,—how would

she ? ' said Iveagh. ' I've been for an hour at the horses since then.'

' She might have guessed, whatever it was, you wouldn't do it for the asking,' said Wickford.

Iveagh agreed with him, settling into a book. Ten minutes later the Duke, glancing that way, discovered him fast asleep in his chair, one of the fine nervous hands he wasted on groom's work commonly, across his face.

' The worst's over,' thought the wise brother, and sat a little, debating of the difficult years past, just closing as he trusted, before he went to dress. Wickford had many feelings during those moments, common relief at responsibility removed being merely one. But beyond that single phrase we quote he made no further effort to express them,—so why need we ?

Lise left next day, finishing her visit beautifully as she began it : taking it quietly rather, for she was sorry to go. M. du Fretay kissed her hand in the hall, and she clung to Ernestine as far as the larches : but the Suir boys alone ' squired ' her to the station, and saw her off with all honour from the ash-strewn platform their mother had instituted, in the great days when Holmer was first made. To be seen off by a peer of the realm and his brother is not, of course, a very common event in life : but Lise forgot about it. She only remembered Wick and Iveagh belonged to her old life, to her own people, and that they were both very nice.

' Good-bye,' said Wick and Iveagh politely, since every human being in the station bounds had a lingering eye fastened upon them, or rather upon Lise.

' Good-bye, ye nice people,' said Mrs. Elphinstone, longing to kiss them both : only such natural impulses

of our being must, in certain circumstances, be restrained.

‘Won’t you give us a keepsake?’ said Wickford with pathos, hanging on the train.

‘There’s a shamrock,’ said Lise condescendingly, taking an extremely dead bit of clover out of the breast of her coat. It might have been hay by the look of it. ‘Don’t give it the animals to eat,’ encouraged Lise. ‘Keep it yourselves. You can divide it.’

‘Which of us’ll divide it?’ said Iveagh, fixing her with his sad eyes.

‘You,’—across Wickford, very soft.

‘Lise,’ began the Duke, nobly protesting, as Iveagh, without the smallest hesitation, pocketed the whole of the hay.

‘There’s no time for it,’ urged Lise, leaning down from the train with an arm on Wickford, holding him close, to the scandal of the porters. ‘Let him,—it’s like Esau. He’ll always dispute your heritage with you, and be snatching things, and tearing things, and bother your life out, and not be worth the trouble you’ve taken for him in the end. You’re the best of the two, Wick, and I tell you so——’

‘But he’ll be first in the story,’ said Wickford, with a little smile.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ gasped Lise. ‘He got in front, somehow. It’s a way they have, me dear. It can’t be helped.’

Then she went, crying, though she did not mean Iveagh to see it. He was not worth crying for, either of them, and she was going very soon to Mark. Yet they were her own people, brothers in tears and laughter, and,—even had one of them never worshipped her, and kissed her shoe in the garden,—that is much. It is well

behind the great passions of life, the purple patches, the high heroisms, such as Mark's plunge in the Indian torrent ; but it is the warm corner, to which Irish hearts at least cling very fondly.

So Lise cried for Iveagh, most of the way to London, —though she loved Mark.

XX

IMPLICATION OF ELEVEN INFANTS

I

ABOUT the surprising incident at the infant-school picnic we find no note whatever in M. du Frettay's journal, which, attentively adapted, has been of such service to us hitherto. He simply leaves it out, as though such little things occurred daily, in the strange country he was visiting. Whether it was that he felt himself out of it, as regarded the central occurrence, which was quite the most thrilling thing that ever happened at Holmer ; or whether it was that the thing itself was too *outré* for his nice French taste, we cannot say. There is, as now published, a general tone of easy cynicism about his English notes, to which the incident is ill-adapted. It approached a 'trick effect,' which of all things, in clothes, conversation, life and manners, the du Frettay standard of elegance abhorred. The Oxboroughs thought people from Paris passed their lives in making trick effects,—though they admitted this particular young Parisian's clothes were decent ; so they would be equally astonished at our theory and his view. But we only advance it modestly ; for it is quite possible a fresh and unexpected flash of cynicism from M. du Frettay, by post after publication, would explode it quite. He might, for instance, say he left the incident expressly for Miss Allgood's interpretation

and commentary, since she, as Certificated Nature Student, and exponent of Prussian methods by violence, was better qualified.

We should be bound, however, to reply to M. du Frettay, that Sir George took the matter seriously : and he, in the sort of case, was the best qualified Nature Student of all. Sir George considered that, even if the picnic in general had not been in danger, that April day, a small wandering item of the picnic, one of Renie's and Lise's beloved 'babies,' might have been. Shocking danger,—almost too bad, in the precincts of England, and neighbourhood of Hatchways, to be believed. This was the point in the day's doings that stirred the women-folk so deeply : and which brought the Duchess and Mrs. Redgate, with slightly different points of view but just the same anxiety, back into the ways of understanding again.

Sir George heard the news that the creature had escaped, on arriving at Reading platform, where, since he took the unclassical train to town, he had to change. He might have heard it before, of course, had anyone at Holmer read the papers ; but the Duchess, when she had things and people, only skimmed it : and Wickford, though he read attentively, read the wrong part. At first Sir George was indifferent : until some station official told him that the 'tiger,'—everyone from first to last called it a tiger, though it was a young leopard, merely,—had been tracked by the circus-manager among the farms in the Harkfield direction. It had killed a goat.

Sir George, at this, stood still on his two feet a moment, and then walked to the bookstall and bought a map. Harkfield he knew as the residence, more or less, of Canon Oxborough, the youngest and liveliest

of Gertrude's three brothers, but he could not recollect its situation. He found it ten miles away from Holmer north; and the Belvedere he remembered (having a geographical mind) was to the north of Holmer.

Folding up the map, which he stowed away for future reference, Sir George therewith determined three things: to miss his train to London: to wire both ways, to Wickford and the friend in town who was expecting him: and to go and see the circus manager. The reason of these decisions was double: first, that Sir George was fond of children, and second, that he had never happened to meet a tiger face to face. His visiting list was limited to lions, elephants, bears, and a panther or two. A tiger, if it was one, even born in a cage, struck Sir George as just worth looking up.

Even thus he proceeded. He wired to Wickford—'Circus big cat escaped chances dangerous returning Trenchard.' He wired to his friend Ashwin in Harley Street—'Tiger hunt here will try evening George': a form of words which (being exactly like him) infuriated a busy doctor, and upset the economy of a careful house. Then, having thus simply relieved his mind of his social responsibilities, Sir George stepped off with his light stalking tread to interview the circus manager on the outskirts of the town.

The manager was having a bad time between the police and the reporters, and having lost valuable property into the bargain, was able to turn in no new direction without swearing. He swore at Sir George, not knowing his name at first, nor caring when he knew it: and he had good reason before he had done with him. The interview, since Sir George wanted that tiger as much as the manager, was of a peculiar nature. First Sir George, in business terms, with a card and

references, betrayed his interest. Were they looking for the beast? Of course they were,—two of his men were at Harkfield. Might he take a hand, just on his own, gratuitously? The manager supposed so, if he thought himself good for anything. How old was the creature? Seventeen months. Born in captivity? Yes. Healthy? Yes, confound it. Tame? No, plague take it. Vicious? Not exactly,—it depended, tricky,—like all its beastly kind. Ever attacked anybody? Once, it had. Why? The manager dodged the question. Why called a tiger on the circus bills? Because it performed, or was supposed to. Performing tigers more stylish than performing leopards, any fool could see. Besides there had once been a tiger, of sorts,—now the lot were rather mixed. Might the visitor look at the mixed lot, sometime? O' course, if he paid his place. Might he not, say by paying two places, have a private interview? The man dared say, with a suspicious glance, he could. (He began to take him for an inspector, disguised, at this point.) How did they hope to take the truant? Lord knew,—in a net, if asleep. If not, he supposed, cripple and cure it later. Horrid waste of cash. Cursed swindle. Somebody was a fool.

Sir George then went off 'on his own,' with the remark at parting that should he see the beast, chances were he should shoot it. He did not cotton to hunting with fishing-nets, at his time of life.

'Then you'll pay for it,' said the manager.

'Right,' said Sir George, 'but I keep the skin. Is it in decent condition?'

The man, now finally convinced of his identity as an agent of a certain detested Society, burst into profanity, and the interview at Reading closed.

Next arose the bitter question of fire-arms. Sir George's own trusted weapons were in town, most of them being seen to. Wickford, of course, had the British sportsman's kit. On the other hand, given Harkfield as the centre, Holmer was out of the way. Harkfield was easier to reach from Reading, too, trains stopped there more constantly; and Canon Lionel Oxborough (being more Oxborough than Canon) owned both a revolver and a gun. Thus, having warned Gertrude's family of the peril, which might be none at all, Sir George settled to make for Harkfield and Lionel direct, by the immediate train.

We pass—in this rapid review of the day's experts—to Miss Ryeborn. The hunter was prominent and interesting on the occasion, doubtless, but there was a more prominent and interesting figure still; and for any really sympathetic light on the movements and aims of that four-legged figure, the world had ultimately to go to Bess. True, Bess did not know about leopards so fully as Sir George, but she knew, in really intimate and all-round fashion, about the leopard's little kinsfolk, cats. A leopard bred in captivity is little other than a cat. The feline race, speaking broadly, were darlings, to Bess: and this biggish cat remained a darling, in spite of all, whenever referred to afterwards in really confidential talk. She took the greatest pains, later, out of sheer love, to follow its programme, during its day and a half of unfamiliar freedom: the reasons for its movements, and the excuses for its crimes. She explained it to the farmer whose stock had suffered; she would gladly have explained it to Renie's children who, led by Renie and the Duchess, inclined to think it a horrible ogrish beast. She passionately longed, for the sake of the other mixed cats still in his power,

to explain it to the circus-manager ; though, for this particular spotted cat, such interpretation would have come too late.

Nor were any of these people really interested. Long after, in the presence of various open-mouthed Ox-boroughs, Bess ran through the leopard's programme, and the whole of the picnic-day incident, from his sole point of view. She was asked to do so, for the benefit of Sir George and another jungle expert, who, vastly admiring such accurate information and imaginative sympathy, dwelt on every word.

We shall take occasion to wander into Bess's dominion later, nor will there be any doubt when we do so, it differs in kind so greatly from Nature Study according either to Froebel, du Fretay, or Sir George. The psychological study of beasts is still a science in infancy, but it progresses. A whole mass of accurate and loving information will be at the service of its first exponents, so soon as the science is allowed to take its place. England, owing to her collector-students, her sportsmen, and spinster ladies, may well be foremost among the countries that contribute ; and it will be a legitimate feather in her cap, if she so should be.

We come on (and it is time) to Miss Allgood. Irene has only been treated by allusion and innuendo so far in this history, which is extremely unfair to an excellent little ' sort of girl.' Irene had no voice that day, in the physical sense, but she had lots of voice in the moral. She showed the courage of a little lion, and she kept her frightened flock in hand. Mrs. Redgate had no trouble with her, when the moment came to break the news of the creature's probable proximity. She whitened, for she feared wild beasts, when not in the tale of Red Ridinghood, or outlined on Kindergarten

cards. Even cats she did not love, though she took picked infants to see Miss Ryeborn's 'dear pussies' occasionally. She was a shocking little pedant, as Gabriel and Rick had long since agreed; but she was essentially valiant and self-forgetting, as are most of our wonderful little army of mothering-teachers: and she sat in the Duchess's broken shed, telling stories with her thread of a voice, while men, guns, and an unknown terror were circling beyond her,—as women have done to stay panic on ship-board, when secretly warned the ship was going down.

So du Frettay noted, correcting several of his easy impressions about her, as, armed with a stick alone, he guarded the wide entrance to the children's retreat. And thereafter, when he met Renie tripping nose in air about the village, he swept his hat off with the same agreeable excessiveness he had used, in the Holmer roadway, to lovely Lise. Courage and self-forgetting are not all one requires, certainly, of a woman, but they were much, in du Frettay's view; and when a girl is ill with laryngitis, hardened by the daily posture of infallibility, and badly spoiled by a Duchess into the bargain,—one appreciates the appearance of those high qualities in a crisis all the more.

We pass to—at least we glance at—Rick, the *Times* critic, whose courage failed. We would not for a moment be taken as asserting that courage, even in a man, is everything,—nor that critics, as such, fail in it,—nothing in life admits of such arbitrary standards. Also, Rick had the excuse of vagueness, or very inexact information as to the creature's whereabouts. He was vague altogether, thinking out an article, when, on his way back from his wife's woodland lunch, he met the keeper. Tigers, he agreed with du Frettay,

were rather ridiculous, and it sounded uncommonly like a cock-and-bull story of the keeper's boy, as told to him. Rick also knew there were no less than four able-bodied young men more or less in reach of that picnic party, and neglected (being no sportsman) the little fact that they might have but one gun, and that not of the best, between them. That he might be of inestimable service, then and there, by fetching another gun, was far from Mr. Redgate's thoughts at the moment ; nor could it enter his wise head that, failing him, his wife would have to do it ; managing all those boys of hers to let her, since, in the nature of things, no man of them could be spared from the children's guard.

All these, the mere spiritual necessities of the case, given those men and women, did not reach Rick's mind ; being perhaps more used to dealing with art, the reflection of life, than the spiritual facts of life itself. Personally he knew, with his bad sight, with gun or stick either, he would be good for naught : and, since the keeper with a loaded gun was going on to warn them, Rick went home. That is all that happened, simply. He was very glad to see du Frettay and Nesta safe home again at tea-time,—especially as he wanted his tea,—and he never discovered Nesta had known he met the keeper. She would not have thought of pressing such a point, when he had been so sensible, and done what she expected, in getting home as fast as possible. That is all about Rick.

Having thus given away the plot, we proceed to the drama of the day, which was very commonplace drama, much like all other picnics to start with, and never getting to more than rather broad and absurd, and perhaps rather strained drama at the worst. It

started with fire-building and fun for the children, and proceeded to food, of course. Later in the day, everyone was to be serious. Nature Study, not to say a demonstration in front of the gentlemen, was lurking among Miss Allgood's intentions: a serious consultation with Mrs. Redgate on the subject of Adelaide was at the back of Sam's mind: art, as usual, occupied the entire outlook of Bess. Or, if not the entire outlook—well, there was not much, that day, to be expected anywhere else.

Iveagh, from his first appearance, dissociated himself markedly. There were really too many kids about for him to care to take a hand. Even the food, which so firmly attached Mr. Coverack to that picnic's fate, hardly seemed to do for him. His ideas were otherwise absorbed, and his eyes—as so often out-of-doors—seemed to be made for some other purpose than that of looking at people. He just dropped down one or two things his mother had sent, without comment or message, in the picnic's midst, and stood a moment, taking things in with his sniffing expression,—more as overseer, it seemed, than as guest, or host. Granted he found things about right in this part of his brother's estate, his expression said, he was going on again, shortly.

'Glory, what a smoke,' was his only remark,—which was, indeed, inevitable.

'Oh, Rick, *really!*' said Ernestine. 'Bess!'

Rick was engaged in making the fire,—well, as he considered. It was true the fire 'ran to smoke,' but then, he explained to du Fretay across his shoulder, out-door fires always did. He had excellent material, lots of it, which the children had collected: he even had a basket grate in the shelter of the broken-down

shed. He watched the fire running to smoke with great complacency, and expended countless matches, which strewed the ground.

At this point came Bess, despatched by Ernestine, and fell upon the malefactor.

‘Look,’ said Bess, falling on her knees, ‘at that nice little flame, all wasted! What’s the *point* of a flame like that, unless it’s *doing* something?’ She fed it carefully with four small sticks. ‘And look at the way he’s choked the poor thing up—’ She abstracted tight balls of paper. ‘And fancy clapping the most indigestible great things down *first*, Renie! Why—Iveagh would have known better!’

Iveagh believed, with indifference, he’d have let the air under.

‘Of course you would,—science! There—’ said Bess to the fire, soothingly. ‘You have to look well forward. You mustn’t discourage any hopeful sign. You must give it first what it likes, of course, only—’

‘With an eye to the event,’ said her uncle, observing her. ‘I say, strikes me this is education, rather than science. What do you say, Miss Allgood?’

Miss Allgood, sitting on the wood-pile in the forest clearing, smiled demurely. She could have done the fire, of course, if wanted: only now it seemed to be getting on. Getting things on was most of Miss Allgood’s business. What she undertook in that way came off, generally: her ‘seed-leaves’ turned to radishes, and her tadpoles turned to frogs. Her children turned to men and women, too, eventually, only they did not interest her greatly beyond the age-limit, eight years old. Very, excessively complicated or irregular things did not interest Irene, she preferred them compact. She herself was compact, as she sat

upon a log, hands folded; Iveagh, when his eyes passed over her, thought so: and so, in Adelaide's absence, did Sam. But they were both a trifle shy of her; for, though dainty and pleasant to the eye, she was given to 'crushing' her unprofessional surroundings in daily life.

After dinner,—dinner it was, with pies, and roast potatoes charmingly charred in a wood fire, the best there are,—serious purpose, such as the Duchess most approved, descended on the company. Bess, who had been playing with the infants, took up her materials, and went away towards the view to sketch. Rick, having smoked a pipe with the young fellows, set out homewards,—Nature Study was not his line. Sam went a stroll with Mrs. Redgate, retained beforehand. Irene 'took' the children,—she always 'took' both persons and subjects,—within hearing of M. du Frettay, who, being from France, would be safe to be impressed. Child Study, in the highest sense, is unknown in France, Nature Study also. She classified the 'specimens' the infants brought her, calling each woodland thing in turn by its Latin name.

'Is she right?' signalled Gabriel once sidelong, hoping to stir criticism: but Iveagh was not critically inclined. He was not even attending much,—he was restless.

'I'm goin',' he observed to his surroundings.

'Right,' said Gabriel, 'if you can't be pleasant.'

'Mother's makin' a glass house,' remarked Iveagh, still to nobody in particular.

'What, to be enabled to cast more stones?'

'No,—to stick things in. Tricky little things,—tropical. I got her one or two.'

'You imply the Duchess requires your friendly

assistance? That you ought to be at her right hand?'

Iveagh sniffed. 'I gave her hope,—sometime.' He added, after a pause—'She had the look of needin' me, at breakfast.'

'Never!' Gabriel glanced, amused. 'What do you want, you oddity?' he thought.

'I suppose you'll be all right here,' said Iveagh, lifting an eyebrow at the picnic scene.

'I?—or the company? I think, do you know, with my hostess's help, we shall manage to get through.'

'He'll be along himself, with luck,' murmured Iveagh.

It was, Gabriel began to see, a clash between tribal duty to Mrs. Redgate on Holmer land, and his own more sylvan, savage mood. Receiving Mrs. Redgate out of doors was something of a puzzle, to Iveagh's instincts. Himself, i.e. Wickford, a tamer character in training of the English Court, might be able to manage it. Gabriel, so interpreting, volunteered a solution.

'I will tell her,' he said, 'that you are at her service, if required. Will that do?'

It did: Iveagh went, at once. Probably not to the glass house, but du Frettay did not enquire into it. He smoked in the thin shade of the April trees, thinking about him,—till the keeper came.

II

'Is Mrs. Redgate here, sir?' said the keeper, looking upon the group of children with a dubious eye.

'Just beyond there,' said du Frettay. He lazily watched the interview of the keeper and Ernestine re-

turning, for Sam had gone on his way. He saw her stand, for an instant, very still: but then, she often did that. Still lazy, skimming surfaces only, he looked at her capable form, easeful carriage, and hatless head with the pleasure she never failed to awaken in him. Her cordial face made one with the rest, as a rule, but for the moment, he could not see her face. He noted, though, that beside the keeper, a splendidly tall man, she looked tall no longer. Such was England.

'It's killed a goat, 'm,' was the keeper's information,—the end of it. 'Mauled it something horrible. And if my boy's right, it was seen close here this morning.'

Close here—in the safe precincts of an English wood—and killed a goat. . . . Mauled it,—mutilated. . . . She turned and looked upon the group of children, her eye counting them up. Eleven, that was right,—but Bess—

'Which direction was it seen in?'

'Up by the Belvedere, 'm.' Oh, Bess!

'Did you see Mr. Redgate?'

'Yes'm,—just mentioned it. Hadn't much time.'

'Have you told the Duke?'

'No'm. I thought his Grace was hereabouts.'

'He's at the house, I think.' It was two to three miles back to Holmer.

'Better get 'em into the shed,' said the keeper, an eye shifting to the Nature Study party.

'Yes, poor dears.' Ernestine had time to think that it spoilt their happy day.

'I sent my boy back to Holmer,' said the keeper. 'But Mr. Warrener's is nearer here. Or Mr. Marchant's.'

'Has Mr. Marchant fire-arms?'

‘Not likely, ’m. Mr. Warrener would have shot-guns, same as this is. Better’n nothing. Shall I get on there——?’

‘I’ll go,’ said Mrs. Redgate. ‘You must stay here, please, till the Duke comes. Irene, dear,—M. du Frettay!’

Gabriel was on his feet. He had never been summoned in that clear tone before: it was something, he was then certain. The next instant Wickford himself, unarmed, having of course missed the messenger, walked tranquilly upon the scene.

‘I thought I’d look you up——’ he was beginning, host, like Iveagh. He had not been able, quite, to keep away. Being busy that day he had, on a sudden impulse, put his lunch in his pocket, and done the three miles easy, as a midday walk.

‘Oh, Wick, just listen—’ said Ernestine.

He joined the group, and they all listened to the story of the keeper’s son, which Rick had heard previously: the skulking yellow thing that had been seen in the covert, not two hours since, fresh from a farm-yard crime.

‘Good Lord!’ said Wickford. ‘I say,—this’ll be rather a jar, for Trenchard.’

He looked at du Frettay, smiling, and received, in response, a smile. Really, for grown men who were not existing either in a jungle, or a fairy-tale, the thing seemed a little wild. A tiger,—in England!

‘It’s mauled a goat,’ mentioned the keeper.

Gravity on all faces, at once: and glances at the children. Even the most ignorant of us, brought up on romances, know the difference to original ferocity made by the taste of blood. Irene’s eleven children would have repeated it pat, if applied to. Not likely,

though, anyone would ask them. No,—Wickford turned grave.

‘I seen the goat—’ began the man, with the usual relish.

‘Drop it,’ said Wickford, seeing poor Irene’s whitening face. Not even well, the girl,—it was beastly hard lines on her. Nor could she be in any way spared, as it happened.

‘Could you tell them about their flowers in the shed?’ suggested Ernestine. The little schoolmarm went, in silence.

‘I’m going in because of my throat,’ they heard her murmur, in her professionally encouraging tone. ‘Who’s coming?’

All came, chattering and tumbling. The children out of sight, the remaining group of four felt better. ‘Who’s missing, else?’ said Wickford curtly.

‘Bess.’

‘Painting?’ She indicated the direction. ‘Where’s the lad?’

‘Iveagh went home, I think,’ said du Frettay.

‘Dash!’ said Wickford, and the keeper knew why. Iveagh was much the best shot.

‘Give us that gun, you,’ said the Duke, taking it, ‘and get along all you know to Warrener’s, keepin’ the paths, and goin’ quietly——’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Redgate. ‘I’m going, I told him. You are all wanted here.’

Then came the battle,—foregone, though, in its conclusion. ‘You ought to ha’ seen Mrs. Redgate take charge of his Grace,’ the keeper grinned to an audience later,—but it was the fact. Habit is everything, in a crisis. Wickford had been a schoolboy when he had known her first, always, though so little older, in the

character of his mother's friend. He was far from weak, yet it was odd how, almost from the first, his look strayed towards Gabriel, the stranger and foreigner, appealing. But Gabriel himself grew helpless when he really met her eyes. It struck him he had hardly known her eyes' colour before,—they were blue-grey, greyer than Bess's. Ernestine was in uniform now, most visibly. She was armed too, at once, with a stick from the forest pile.

'I'll take that,' she said, 'but it's most unlikely the animal would attack, if one goes quietly. That's Bess's best chance too, she will be sitting still. Cat-things are shy, and it has been used to man all its life,—it's not as if we were in India——'

'But it's mauled a goat,' said Wickford's and Gabriel's eyes, though their tongues did not say it.

'I'm as strong as lots of men. Go and find Bess, Wick dear, if you want to help me——'

'Madame,' the young Frenchman broke out, 'I cannot have it! Can you not see? Failing your husband——'

Failing him, yes,—for she would have obeyed Rick: they all knew that. She turned back, having started, to face him.

'I leave you my children, M. du Frettay,' she said. 'Mine, if you please, not Renie's. I brought them out. If one is missing, when I come back,—even the littlest,—Peter——'

Her eyes were alight, but her mouth was dimpling, actually. Ernestine was not especially Manchester, at that moment. Or perhaps she was. Such doggedness, in the spirit of those Northern towns,—such abominable independence of judgment, in critical times!

'Bon, j'y renonce,' said M. du Frettay to everybody. 'Je m'en charge, Madame,—de la famille,—et de Peter surtout.'

He went away with the keeper to find sticks.

'Take the rope, I say,' said du Frettay, just as Wickford was leaving in turn. The rope of the big picnic-hamper, slip-knotted, lay on the ground. Its long coil suggested a lasso, to a hunter's eye.

'What the deuce for?' said Wickford, whose ideas of the chase resembled Sir George's. Ropes and nets did not enter into it. However, when du Frettay reminded him of an owner in the background, and the truant's probable value, he took it up, though his appearance protested. He really had no notion of using it, though a rope added vaguely to his resources, in the singular affray. Wickford was not frightened, but the occurrence irked his nerves, rubbed him up, in the Oxborough phrase, because it was strange. He liked things regular,—the good day's shooting, to him was the classical day. On horseback, thanks to the Irish inspiration, he lost himself a little: whispers from the other-world of the romantic reached him, and could, in the proper setting of turf and bogland, send him off his head. But not often, and not at Holmer: here, at least, he preferred to have things governed, fairly straight.

'Shall I come, your Grace?' said the keeper, in the low henchman's tone. It meant that, as a unique object, not easily matched, the Duke's person was to be protected. Wickford shied at once.

'Why should you?' he said snubbingly. 'Stay where you are, and look out. If the people come,' he added to du Frettay, 'stick them round the wood. It's

probably taken to cover, after that feed. I only hope the light will hold.'

He glanced upward ; then, with a last look round upon the broken shed, with its faintly steaming fire, doorless entrance, and precious contents, he went. Wickford could not get the scene into focus, somehow : it had all come on him too unexpectedly. Here, on Victorian Holmer land, in reach of the Shrubbery and the Prospect,—close to the Belvedere ! A tiger-hunt ! No, it did not do. Picture his mother's face, hearing of it ! Imagine his Uncle Oliver ! As he proceeded, the Duke's mouth gave its little twitch, sardonical.

From the moment that he heard his brother's whistle, in the thicket off to the left of the path, which spread up the swelling hillside the Belvedere dominated, he found things begin to slip into their places and proportions again. Nothing the world held was too weird for Iveagh, anyhow. A tiger in Berkshire was matter-of-course, compared with him, the kind of thing he stood for, in Wickford's mind and memory. No one, of course, knew Iveagh's contents better than he did,—had more reason to know. If nothing else, the magnificent scene by bicycle-lamplight,—staged not so very far, as it happened, from this spot,—was always there, haunting the back of the brother's consciousness, quickly recalled by a look or a tone. Wickford had been lifted to his level on that occasion, easily : he had surprised himself, not a little. Now——

Iveagh had forgotten all about the glass house, and his mother's rare aspect of needing him, evidently, long since. He was grubbing round a tree-trunk for some favourite funguses, quite happy and absorbed, when he was disturbed by Wick, a loaded gun, a lasso-looking rope, and the unusual bit of news. Or rather

not disturbed,—he was interrupted. He gazed levelly, his eyes still cave-dwelling, fungus-hunting, and unconcerned.

‘Rats!’ he remarked, at the tiger’s name. It was instinctive.

‘Where’s Miss Ryeborn?’ said Wickford.

‘She’s up beyond, there, paintin’. Said she was goin’ up, to get the view.’ Iveagh took a look round at the thicket he stood in, dusting his fingers, which were earthy. ‘I’ve not seen anything about,’ he said suggestively. ‘Crocodiles or anything,—I’ve had lots to do.’

‘The brute’s mauled a goat,’ said Wickford. ‘Hudson had seen it, down at Finch’s farm. Mauled it horrid. It was marked close here.’

Iveagh’s eyes changed. ‘Who marked it?’

‘Jem Hudson, the young one. Close to the path.’

‘Jem’s a liar,’ said Iveagh, weighing it. ‘However—just hand me those traps.’

‘What?’ said Wickford, clutching the gun and the rope: for it was that, quite evidently, that his brother’s careless hand required.

‘Granted it’s here, and not in Jem’s fat head, I’ll find it,’ elucidated Iveagh. ‘As for shootin’, we’ll see to that,—or rather the gun will. That one might shoot a sparrow, at need.’ He ran a chaffing eye over Wickford’s equipment, and added casually—‘I’ll manage it. Let you get down to the kids.’

‘What’s that?’ gasped Wickford. ‘You just repeat that, ye little——’

‘Come on,’ said Iveagh patiently. He did not say he was the better shot, but it was apparent. It was far too apparent in his whole behaviour. ‘Dangerous for Dukes,’ he proceeded, as Wickford’s deep emotion kept

him silent,—this was Iveagh's chance, as a rule. 'You might be wanted.'

'Who by?'

'Oh, well,—Mother.' He smiled completely. 'Look out, now, playin', you'll waste a charge——' He spoke cajoling, quite charming for the instant. The uncanny look shifted like a shadow, and in a flash Wickford saw his father clear. A hundred delightful memories sprang to light in his manner and his eyes. Confident and competent, and more,—the whole promise of the future in that one flash from the past.

'I'll not waste it, I can tell you, if you speak so to me,' spluttered Wickford. Was he six years older than Iveagh, or was he not?

'You will,' returned Iveagh, 'you'll waste it worse.' He snapped his fingers. 'Come on, the girl's waitin',' he said, and his eyes moved away up the path.

It was then Wickford had his idea.

'He d—disarmed me,' he stammered to du Frettay, arriving disconsolate and discomposed. 'He said it was d—dangerous for Dukes. He's a cheeky little blackguard. I can't—do with him always.'

He sank down on the logs by the shed, hand to brow, quite overcome.

'All right,' said du Frettay. 'You did the only thing.'

'Th—think so?'

'Of course,—very smart.'

He quite understood it,—the keeper did too. They both looked aside till Wickford recovered. He had done the only thing, the clever thing really in giving way, abandoning the lead at such a critical juncture, but his pride had suffered, naturally: du Frettay could

guess how much. The keeper, who had seen shades of the same thing, often, when Iveagh, with a flash of that irresistible assumption, 'wiped his brother's eye' in the sporting field, was just as sympathetic. Neither of them noticed the Duke had been knocked out, and Wickford recovered tone almost immediately, and got up.

'Give us a stick,' he said, and snatched one. 'Oh, Lord!'—he whitened,—'What's that?'

'Sacr—r—r——' muttered du Frettay, with a low thunder of French r's. A snarl, distant but unmistakable, fierce and fearsome, broke the silence on the hill. Then a second long choking snarl: then silence.

It was the bad moment, within the shed, and without it. Wickford had vanished like a shade. Gabriel before the door stood at attention, carrying his stick like a sabre, his blue eyes well open, fixed on the leafage at the turn of the path. No tiger was to get by him alive, that was evident. The keeper, a tall man (and a father), retiring, spread his arms across the doorway. Neither knew the least, of course, what to expect. Behind both, the children's little frightened questions chirping faintly, and Irene's clever laugh as she responded.

'A wild pussy, Peter. Only a poor pussy. You just wait.'

They all just waited, for what seemed an interminable period. No sign of Bess, Wickford, or Iveagh, who had all melted for good, as it seemed, behind that screen of leaves. No cry, growl, rustle, nor further sign. Then—*enfin!* Two sharp reports, one close after the other, relieving the cruel silence.

'That's a revolver,' said du Frettay, turning sharply. 'Who has a revolver, round here?'

'Couldn't say, sir,' said the keeper, 'unless it should be Mr. Warrener. Not my old gun, anyhow,—I'm sure of that.' He searched the leaf-scrub with a restless eye. 'Hope they potted it,' he murmured. 'No fun, sir, such things about, children and all, excuse me.'

'No excuse necessary,' said du Frettay. 'It is no fun.'

'If it was his lordship, I'd trust him,' elucidated the keeper, still searching. 'But Mr. Warrener's fellows potting about on our land——'

'You would not trust,' supplied du Frettay. 'Perfectly, I apprehend you.' He stayed a space listening and looking, like his companion, intently. 'I wish the girl would show up,' he said to himself.

'That's it, sir,' said the keeper. 'Miss Bess, she's Mrs. Redgate's niece, sir——'

'I am aware of it.'

'I mean——'

'I know what you mean. Mrs. Redgate will be anxious. I am very glad,' mused du Frettay, 'she was not here lately, to hear those sounds.'

'I was thinking the same, sir, at the moment, excuse me——'

'You require no excuse.'

'No, sir, but——'

'I know. It is your habit,' said du Frettay with sympathy. 'Centuries old.' He remained another space, listening closely. 'Now,' he said, lifting his alert young head, 'I will tell you something,—with your excuses.'

'Yes, sir,' submitted the keeper, who had been looking at him puzzled, yet appreciative. The whole of the Holmer out-door staff regarded Gabriel like that. He was a gentleman anyone would be proud to serve,

to look at him. He was even handsomer than Captain Elphinstone, as athletic, and much more affable. But he said such things.

‘It is my impression,’ said Gabriel seriously to the keeper, ‘since those revolver-shots, that the circus-proprietor will be disappointed. I cannot say why. There was about them, to my mind, I cannot say what of reassuring. Of clean,—of cocksure,—of chic,—no, that is French.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the keeper.

‘Well, find me a word for it then! You know my meaning,—Lord Iveagh on horseback has it also. The masterly,—and masterful,—*sapristi!* The style—prenatal, which potting persons like myself and you and the Warreners shall seek for ever and vainly to imitate. The style—intuitive, which is the only existing—adorable—Aha, Sir George!’

XXI

IT

WE move into Bess's realm, with excuses, like the keeper: just at the minute when Iveagh entered it also, bearing the gun. The footpath he followed upward emerged upon the hill-top, and there came the view, so perfectly described to du Frettay by Lise. And there also, in all its solemn absurdity, barring 'the counties, and England, and Europe to the Ural Mountains,' with its clap-trap plaster columns and pseudo-classical effect, stood the Belvedere. And there, on the step of the little temple, had Miss Ryeborn prepared to establish herself happily for the after-dinner hours, since it was sunny and warm. And there, since it was sunny and warm,—and quiet, no harrying farmers with forks about,—had another personage already determined to be established, for a nice sleep and sun-bath, after a full meal. Inverted, prolonged inordinately,—just like the Pickle in the flower-bed: smooth tawny paws curling and spreading, sheathing and unsheathing slightly,—just like the Pickle's too: blissful, blinking eyes, nose vibrating to an inward simmering, a slumber-tune, deep-seated,—sometimes a heave of a happy person, slipping a little further into the sunshine, snake-like,—oh!

'Oh!' said Bess. '*Oh!*' And nothing more, for long.

'It' blinked at her, curious, wondering,—then settled again, without need of more enquiry. *That* was all right.

It thought (Bess explained later) the pillars, and the shadows of the pillars, were like bars, a trifle. Like enough to feel at home, with a charming difference,—for here you could get out between. You just fitted between, which pleased you. There is that, in your exact fastidious nature, which loves to fit. The Pickle, at times, had fitted into Uncle Rick's hat, for the same reason. Uncle Rick did not appreciate the reason, but Bess did. Nice adjustment, adequacy, finish,—the genius of the just-so,—that is It.

Bess began to draw, rapidly, furtively, mapping in its long lovely lines. Its face would come presently, if she had time for it,—if, of course, it was kind enough to allow her time. She knew all about the risks of mood-changing, from the Pickle: and also that the after-dinner, or Oriental, mood is best. Of course, she meant to go and tell Ernestine, away down there, sooner or later, only—well—art is art. Not twice, nor once in a lifetime usually, does a passionate student of the cat-tribe get the chance.

A shadow touched her page, and a light Suir step was audible. They moved so well, those boys, no hint of the Oxborough clumping. Of course, their woodland studies helped them, but it was part of their pleasant presences too. She was sure it was he or Wickford, before she looked behind her. She looked and saw—the right one. Did her face betray it, welcoming?

'Oh, Iveagh,' said Bess, with a kind of fearful joy. '*Look* what I've found! It's purring!'

Bess had made friends with the 'tiger.'

Iveagh was an Irishman, luckily. He laid his gun

down inconspicuously in a dry place, and moved with a smooth step to her side. The creature was passive after a full meal, so much was evident. One could not judge for what its taming went,—there was no instant danger, anyhow, if danger at all. Still, his eyes fixed it attentively as he approached, the hunter's look, alert and steady. His attitude was not Bess's, quite. The depredator of his brother's farm had something to answer for.

'Hullo!' said the leopard, lifting its head a little, eyes wide. 'Another of 'em. Who are you?'

'I'm her brother, if that does,' said Iveagh.

'Not so sure,' said the leopard, but it laid its head back again. It rolled a little, lazily playful in the sunlight. It had been through some bad hours, since yesterday,—anxious ones,—really horrid,—but it felt better, much better, for goat.

'Happen to know it's been killin' farm-stock,' said Iveagh, through his teeth. 'Better get out of it, do you mind? Wick's below there, waitin'.'

'Oh, but——' said Bess. Seeing his steady gaze fixed past her, she added unwillingly—'All right.'

When she moved, the rolling creature looked at her, over its own head. It ceased its lazy sinuous movements, and, still comfortably reclining, stared up, curling a paw. 'Oh, come, don't go,' it said. 'We were so comfortable. What's all this about?'

'Go on,' said Iveagh, as the girl stopped, dubious.

'It's rather a darling,' she murmured. 'It was so good with me.'

'Go on.'

'But I mean it mightn't be if—oh, Iveagh!' She had seen the gun.

'Go on,' he said patiently. 'I won't let it follow. You'll be quite safe.'

'Safe?' She saw the noosed rope in his hand, and realised his intention simultaneously. The next instant—heaps of things occurred. He threw the lasso, since the animal lay stationary, watching them, over the head. Then, with miraculous swiftness, he ran the other long end round a column of the Belvedere, and knotted it with the knot that does not slip. Plenty of wise, grown men,—Professor Marchant, for instance,—would have fumbled delaying at that critical instant, while others the world calls dull or vague note things like the non-slipping knot from their earliest years. After which Iveagh retreated to his gun, while the leopard, waking with a sharp snarl, straining every way on the rope with wonderful, seeking, passionate movements, found itself fast.

'Oh, how beautiful,—how beautiful!' almost sobbed Bess. 'Oh, look, look at it! Mayn't I——?'

'You may not,' he returned. 'Go on down.' His gun was in his hand, raised, levelled,—the horror of it seemed imminent, to Bess's eyes.

'*Please* don't kill it,' she gasped, with a real sob.

'I'll not, if I can help it,' he repeated, in that patient tone which struck her, it was so unlike him. 'Go on, it's really all right, Miss Ryeborn. It can't get off.'

Miss Ryeborn! Was it that, the title offered her, that betrayed his real anxiety? Woman-like, that detail told her everything, all she needed to know. Ropes taken from picnic-baskets are not of necessity reliable,—ropes may break. Pillars of Early-Victorian temples,—half-strangled forest animals,—cats, beauti-

ful cats, clever cats, the most cunning of created things——

Bess whitened, and went. Before she went, she put a cold little hand down on his warm one. 'Iveagh,—don't let it kill you——'

As her steps retreated down the path, something happened in Iveagh, quiet as he stood, his eyes upon the furious animal. His pale face flushed slightly, slowly, and his mouth's line changed. Some idea or prospect, beyond the immediate one of the cat in the temple, seemed to creep into his consciousness. It filled him—conviction—he did not want to be killed! Perhaps an hour before, groping in the great blank of life since Lise's departure, he would rather have welcomed the opportunity offering at present, a battle royal with a worthy foe: a violent, possibly disagreeable, but at least respectable end. But now—no! Sooner would he kill that leopard-cat (against orders) than that leopard-cat killed him! His face took on the arrogant, human, hunting-light. He and the leopard were 'social equals' no longer!

'Curse you, whoever you are,' snarled the Cat, rolling and straining, here, there, and everywhere, in magnificent attitudes, a paw to the rope about its throat. 'Get me out of this,—I don't care for it,—it hurts.'

'Get yourself, if you can,' said Iveagh. 'Only look out.'

'Good, there's a strand gone,' said the Cat. 'Look out yourself, you common little man.'

'Do you know what this is?' enquired Iveagh.

'Not specially,—I've forgotten,' sneered the Cat. Carelessly, as it lay, it eased the strain on its throat by winding the rope twice about a strong leg. 'Lord,

I've a throat-ache ! What if I pulled this toy-temple down ? '

'Try and see,' said Iveagh.

'You silly young ass,' said the Cat, its gloomy eyes reddening. 'That's what the goat said.' (Crack.) 'Seen that goat ? '

'Found the stone-edge to work on,' commented Iveagh. 'Good line that. You'll hardly get hung at this rate. Shame to shoot you. Rotten shame.' He aimed between its eyes.

'I give it up,' said the Cat, looking past him arrogantly. 'I don't want to get off,—never meant to, really. I rather like ropes.'

'Know about 'em anyhow,' said Iveagh.

'You're not so clever as you think you are,' sneered the Cat, shifting its head.

'I ain't boastin', am I ? ' said Iveagh, shifting the gun.

'I'm better-class than you,' said the Cat.

'You ain't,' said the son of Suir.

'My ancestors——' said the Cat, and paused. 'I say, suppose you go and call that man of mine. My collar hurts a bit. . . . Or that young lady with the pretty paws. She'd do,—I liked her quite a lot. I've something to (Crack) say to her, in private.'

'I'd like to be sure this'd slay anything bigger than a weasel,' said Iveagh, to himself.

'What's that ? ' said the Cat, who did not understand English. 'It hurts, I tell you. My neck's sore——'

'Do you mean your leg ? ' said Iveagh.

'You're quite a nice young fellow,' said the Cat. 'I dare say your family's decent. (Crack.) Bargain, I say. Just look here——'

Crack. Snap. Rumble. Two shots following one another in close succession. A roar, fading to a choking snarl. A beautiful, sand-coloured, struggling heap in the pathway, right outside the ruined temple,—completely clear of it——

‘You young—idiot!’ said Sir George Trenchard, cheerfully, coming with Canon Oxborough (of all people) round the other corner of the Belvedere. ‘Didn’t I say dangerous, in my telegram?’

‘She—she told me not to kill it,’ stammered Iveagh, hopelessly taken aback by this dénoûment, and the sudden slackening of the strain. He stared as though fascinated at the sandy shape of Bess’s Cat,—the little trickle of fatal red by the shoulder, at which the Canon’s dogs were sniffing, dubiously.

‘Ah,—well, I’m afraid it’s dead,’ said the hunter. ‘Twice over, probably. Hold up, now.’ Laying a hand on the boy’s arm, for caution, he took the still-loaded gun from him. ‘Here’s your uncle. I say, Lionel, hard luck on him. Perhaps we ought to apologise.’

‘Yes,’ minced the Canon (who ought not to have been carrying fire-arms). ‘Rather beastly, nippin’ in under his nose like that. Picking up the swag,—eh? I say, Iveagh, my lad, just look at this temple! What ever will your mother say?’

What is a Duchess to do,—we appeal to a respectful world,—engaged in making a glass house entirely for the good of her family, as the crown of her life’s devotion to her son’s domain,—deserted by a second son whose rare chance for real usefulness had been pointed out to him quite clearly at the breakfast-table,—slaving for others’ interests, in gardening-clothes,

amid dust and paint and centipedes,—who is faced in succession, at the tail-end of the working morning, by such a telegram as George's,—and such news as was handed her by the keeper's boy ?

'Jem,' said the Duchess, 'I hope you have not been drinking.' (This, for the Duchess, represented Iveagh's—'Rats.')

'No, my lady,' said Jem, dreadfully frightened. 'It's gospel truth I saw it. It crossed, like, and jumped the ditch. All yaller, my lady.'

'A cat,' said the Duchess, wonderfully serene : but her eyes were on George's telegram.

'No, my lady. Beggin' your pardon,' said Jem, 'I knows cats. I went home and told 'em. Father went off.'

'Oh, your father believed you, did he? Well'—she folded the telegram neatly—'as it happens, I have confirmatory evidence. So you may be right about it.'

'I saw it, my lady.'

'Very well,' said the Duchess, glancing over the details of the glass house, at which various people resumed work as soon as she glanced. 'And where, exactly?'

'Up by the Belvedere, my lady.' (Heavens, Renie !)
'It'd been eating one of Finch's goats.'

'Rubbish !' said the Duchess steadily.

'I didn't see the goat,' said Jem (who meant to).
'But Jack did, and Father.'

'Never mind about Jack. Do you mean the goat was killed?'

'They had to kill it, my lady.'

'Oh.' Merciful Heaven, those children ! The Duchess's Oxborough nature took time, for dignity's sake, but any accustomed eye could have seen her

bitter disturbance. 'Go to the kitchen, Jem, and get your dinner. Mention there,' said the Duchess, ever more incisively, 'that I shall not require luncheon. *Nor* the Duke,—do you hear?—I want him.' As the keeper's boy retreated, saluting, she raised her voice in his wake. 'And tell Michael, if you see him, Sir George will be back for the night,—another night, make it clear.'

Then, the messenger having gone, she dropped her trowel, took off her gardening-gloves, and threw them down, one upon the other. She gave no orders, left the glass house to its probable fate (considering the goat-and-tiger diversion) and, stepping swiftly in her trim firm fashion, made a bee-line for her son's study windows.

'Conor!' she called sharply beneath them, using the earliest of the three names to which it had been Wickford's fate to answer, in the course of his young life. At times of stress, his mother recurred to it unconsciously.

Conor was not there. Somebody was, though. 'Michael, where's his Grace?'

Gone away down the park, Michael at the window informed her.

Had he taken a gun?

He had not. It was to see Mrs. Redgate his Grace was going.

Mrs. Redgate, indeed! Much more likely another person. However, for once Wickford had gone in the right direction for his mother's needs. He had anticipated her. Renie and the children filled her horizon, not her own children, nor her neighbours and friends. We shall not seek to explain it, at this point, nor need we, to those who *s'emballent*. That is the principle of their living, one thing after another, to the exclusion of all the rest. It is with us at every turn in

England—and America—and Germany—not France : so we proceed.

‘ Where is Lord Iveagh ? ’ said the Duchess.

‘ I can’t say, your Grace.’ Nobody ever could. Still, the chances were fair, that he and Sam and so on were circling round that picnic party. The chances were pretty fair.

‘ Fetch me a gun, Michael,’ said the Duchess. ‘ The best you can find.’ She added—‘ Two guns.’

‘ Yes, your Grace.’ An English servant would have gaped, most probably. Michael merely followed orders, alert and interested. He also knew which guns were which, as few of the house-servants could be expected to do. Michael possessed that inestimable talent called curiosity, an open mind beyond his own concerns. It made him a bad footman, naturally, but a first-rate friend to the household. For once, the Duchess profited by Michael’s open-minded friendliness, which customarily she condemned. He took her order as a matter of course, and filled it out intelligently from his own ideas, as was proved by the kind of gun he brought her. A little later, Michael had the keeper’s boy’s ideas in the kitchen to help him, but by that time he hardly needed them. His vivid imagination had got well ahead, and painted something approaching to a tiger, already.

The Duchess set out : a solitary, sufficient little figure, carrying two guns. There was something magnificently mediæval in it, thoroughly obsolete and Oxborough, which the staff of Holmer from the windows watched and admired. The Duchess might, of course, have summoned a man,—even a man and a dog-cart,—to assist her ; but this matter of the school-children, and their defence on her land, was hers.

No doubt the Duchess trusted her boys, already on the spot, more than she realised. Guns or no guns, those boys would manage it. Not for a minute did she admit such dependence on her offspring,—she had not come to that,—but it was unquestionably there. Unquestionably. . . . Besides, George was returning, he said so.

She had given orders, all round, before she left, of course. The proper thing, to the rear of her, was being done. Messengers scurrying to all the neighbours,—mediæval again. Lionel warned, the only brother in reach. Warrener warned, and the lodges,—more especially the lodges with children. Keep those children at home, if you please, or have nothing more to do with the Duchess. And the ‘men’ informed, of course,—that is, the keepers,—even Mr. Marchant. He came after the lodges and the keepers in her thoughts, but still,—Mr. Marchant mooning in the woods might be in danger. Why not?—But to the Belvedere, Renie, and the children, the Duchess went alone.

She met them all returning : the Ryeborn girl, and the eleven infants, all chirping about the ‘tiger’ cheerfully : Conor and Iveagh, as usual : Lionel, not quite as usual (knee-breeches) : and George. George’s presence made all comfortable, even before he reassured her with a word. The pest was done with, dead. Just as it should be. Just as—circled by her stupid sons—the Duchess had somehow thought probable. But where was Renie ? And where—

‘Behind,’ said Wickford, shortly, ‘just a bit behind. Miss Allgood’s a ripping little girl,—but she broke down.’

‘Was she frightened?’ said the Duchess. Her eyes

lightened reproach on everybody, Iveagh especially. Reproach in reserve for the Ryeborn girl, thus distracting Wickford from his obvious duty at Renie's side. What, could he call her a ripping little girl,—quite rightly,—and still come on in the advance guard? Shame on him, what was he thinking of?—his mother's son!

'Mrs. Redgate's there.'

Oh. . . . Well, that was all right, then. . . .

'Go on,' said the Duchess, to her little world, with urbanity. '*Was it a tiger, Peter? Really?* Yes, you shall tell me about it all, to-morrow, I'll come down. . . . You'll stay dinner, Lionel? They're expecting you at the house, George. Oh, nonsense, he can manage without you.' (Dr. Ashwin, in London.) '*What?*'—as Iveagh, relieving his mother of her warlike panoply, the guns, which she had forgotten, casually informed her that the Belvedere was down. Down? The Belvedere? Wretched boy, what did he mean by it?—However, that would do later on. Renie came first, and whoever was——

'Go on,' said the Duchess to the world again.

'That will come straight now,' said George to Lionel. 'Mark my words.'

'No accounting for Gertrude,' said Lionel, with fraternal philosophy. 'Now then, my young friends, weigh up!' Lionel, in his capacity as Canon, was kindly helping Miss Ryeborn. School treats, of course, were nothing to him: he could steer a crew of eleven kids with one hand,—his nephews rather admired him. He was, in any case, that one of their uncles they could do with most easily: Iveagh went of his own accord to pay him visits, as we mentioned once before.

The infants and the guard went on. The Duchess

went backward, back along the path, through the budding copses, where the nightingales gurgled discreetly in the gloaming, and the other wandering voice of the cuckoo echoed by day : across the clearing, to the little broken shed. Picnic remnants, including Rick's matches by the dozen, strewn the foreground ; for once, the Redgates had neglected to tidy : they were absolutely trustworthy people at the close of picnics, as a rule. This picnic had not been quite like the common run of Hatchways picnics, it would appear. The fire was steaming faintly, mingling with the dim blue April mists. The light was failing a little. A deserted battle-field—possibly.

Not quite deserted. Renie was in the shed, crying, her head on Mrs. Redgate's shoulder. She had done brilliantly, nobly, a ripping little girl, but she had broken down. Her voice was tired,—her throat ached like the tiger's. Her celebrated 'method' did not include live tiger-leopards, nor dead ones, nor men with revolvers still smoking, nor that awful unforgettable snarl upon the hill. It was not fair on her, as Wickford contended, her life altogether was too little for it. And her Peter, he was too little for it too. . . .

'All right, my dear,' said the Oxborough Duchess, kind as Ernestine. 'There was no earthly danger, probably'—she remembered George's telegram—'Still, it's a nasty kind of thing to happen, of course. Stupid of Jem Hudson not to tell you in time,—he's a stupid boy,—all the family.' 'She caught the sly glint of steel in the shadow. 'Oh, you've got a gun too,' said the Duchess.

'Look out, Gertrude,' said Mrs. Redgate, 'it's loaded. I must return it to-morrow to Mr. Warrener, by the cart.'

‘Warrener’s, is it? You went there? Fetched it?—Ah yes, perhaps it was wiser. One never quite knows,’ said the Duchess, dreamily, ‘with children about. . . . Ernestine. . . .’

No, there was no accounting for Gertrude, certainly! Except by old friends, like George, and other women, like Ernestine: who knew quite well.

Mrs. Redgate, returning later to Hatchways, from Holmer, found her husband expecting her, as has been said: and M. du Frettay expecting, because, owing to the Duchess’s great need of Ernestine, he had reached home first. As for Bess, her aunt could not at once discover her, though she looked all about. She grew a trifle anxious, debating of claws, poisoned scratches, and what not: since, to judge by Iveagh’s account, Bess and the creature had been at close quarters, hand to hand.

She unearthed her at last. Bess and the grey kitten were in one another’s arms in the wash-house, the little wash-house beyond the scullery, and Bess was in tears,—what next? First Renie, then Gertrude, now Bess of all people! She hardly ever cried.

‘My dear child, what is it?’ said Mrs. Redgate, coming up to her hastily. Bess might have been through something,—indeed she had been going through much, for long,—but she had faced her fortune upright, bravely. Now——

‘You weren’t frightened?’ said Ernestine, half-chaffing, to encourage her. But no, it was not fear. Fear was about the last thing it was, in Bess’s case.

‘Oh,’ gasped Bess. ‘Oh, Ernestine, he killed it! Not *him*,—Sir George did,—and it’s dead! Killed it with a horrible gun, and I liked it so dreadfully. It

was sweet with me,—purring,—I could have made it good. It might have—stayed the night here at Hatchways, and—gone on to Reading in the morning. It—needn't have been shot like that for nothing. N—nothing but a goat. It—didn't understand property acts. It was—hungry, like Pickle. When Pickle is hungry, we give him things,—lots of things, he's so greedy! It—hadn't had a nice life.' (A gasp of agony.) 'It only wanted talking to,—explaining. Now I can't explain,—and it can't purr any longer. Oh, and it liked me,—trusted,—and I left it——'

Thus Bess, and her voice died fur-muffled, agonised under fur. The Pickle served her, unwillingly, for a pocket-handkerchief. She was mourning for that leopard-cat, dead on the heights in his young glory, beside the broken Belvedere. Her point of view was not Sir George's, nor Gertrude's, nor Ernestine's, nor the circus-manager's, least of all! Only Iveagh came anywhere near it, as usual. Bess was Bess.

'Goose,' said Ernestine, kissing her. 'What else do you expect of an African hunter? And the goat might have been Peter. Come to tea.'

XXII

CAPTURE OF THE HERO

M. DU FRETTAY went back to France,—his mother wanted him. It had been pending for long, menacing in the Parisian background,—now it took place.

‘Come Gabriel,’ directed Madame du Frettay, in a severe telegram : not to be disregarded, as he explained. He had to explain it, because the Suir boys, grouped round the telegram on the Holmer chimneypiece, scoffed at it. Sam scoffed too. Adelaide scoffed, almost violently.

‘You never mean *you’re* tied to apron-strings,’ scoffed Adelaide. ‘*You?*’

M. du Frettay, bold and experienced, adventurous,—a flyer,—gazed at the telegram. He indicated it, mutely. There it was. It faced them. Let them say what they liked, that message in two words replied.

‘Certainly you had better go,’ said the Duchess.

‘Of course,’ said Ernestine.

M. du Frettay swept the Suir boys aside. He neglected Sam, he wiped out Adelaide. He passed the Duchess over, with the requisite flourish of courtesy. But he took Mrs. Redgate to task.

‘You have had enough of me,’ he delicately suggested, remembering Lise.

‘Not at all,’ said Ernestine.

‘Anything but it,’ said Rick.

‘ Still, you send me, Madame. You despatch ? ’

‘ Not at all,’ said Ernestine. ‘ Your desire despatches you.’ She added—‘ Your wish.’

‘ My wish to leave Hatchways, hein ? ’

‘ Not the least. Your wish to go home.’

‘ I am devoted,’ said M. du Frettay, gazing at the sky, for they were out of doors, ‘ to my mother. I have every intention, always,—within reason,—of doing what she says. But how can I leave Hatchways ? ’ He lowered his blue eyes.

It was suggested—by the usual train.

M. du Frettay left Hatchways by the usual train. He did what was required of him, by the best judges, and Mme. du Frettay : but first, he defined his position. He simply had to, it was his French nature. You would not have had him leave Hatchways all anyhow, without rendering account to himself (as he would say) of his exact relation to it and all its contents,—to its mistress above all ? No, the effort was necessary.

It was also interesting. It took him a whole night.

‘ I love her,’ premised M. du Frettay. ‘ Certainly. I worship her almost, like Iveagh. No, not like him,—he knew her as a little schoolboy,—how could it be the same ? I am of her age,—virtually,—so my devotion means more. She is unique,—she is delightful. She is everything I have hitherto dreamed woman could be. Cold,—she ? Common,—that ? She is unmatchable, certainly in France,—in her country, most probably. She is unmatchable : and she is ill-matched.’

Then he thought about that, the ménage, for a period : the palpably ridiculous combination with

Rick. Useless ! Quite useless : criticise as he would, rally it, rail at it, he could not see it otherwise. Not care for her husband ? But she did, she was devoted. She was satisfied too, in her beautifully modest way. She had opened her heart to all, in default of Rick, and so found satisfaction,—was that it ? But that would mean he, Gabriel, was one of a crowd, just as others to her, just comprised in the glow her great benevolence projected upon the common human family. The masses. No !

No : she liked him, his own person, especially. Not as Iveagh, not as Rick,—she had shown it him many times. Discreetly, sweetly, still she had shown it him,—perhaps not intentionally. He was what she considered a man should be. . . . Well, then ! Gabriel had dealt before, in life, with that situation. He had but to rouse himself, resume all those delicately polished weapons he had left behind for a period, owing to the irresistible monoplane. He had proved them, in so many encounters, formerly. He had but to rouse, work this leave-taking to his advantage, and so forth,—that was all.

Yes, but he did not want to ! He did not want to change her, even if he could. His desire—wish—was to have her, now and for ever, just as she was. Radiant, still, suffusing, as those early autumn days, that are so much more beautiful than the summer, so much more cordial, pensive,—Heavens, how lovely were certain looks, certain attitudes, in service or in meditation. And she knew trouble, too,—she had told him. There was storm behind. Was that the difference, possibly, that she stood for conquest ? Three uncommonly pretty girls, in first youth, it had been M. du Frettay's far from disagreeable fate to set beside her,—one

lovely quite without the common rule. Yet she had emerged triumphant. Triumphant, conquering,—unconquerable?—Ha, voilà !

Exquisite problem of her being, never to be solved. How could it be ? If he did not solve it, no other man would, he was certain. Had he not been certain of that—but he was. This was his chance, his alone, and he refused it. What then could be his real position ? How could he so feel, ardently, humbly, and renounce ? Adore, and leave, as he was doing : as he fully purposed to do. And come back at the first opportunity ! R—rather ! For Ernestine held him fast in her delicate indefinable toils. He was bound, literally bound, to return to Hatchways, whenever he could, and as fast as possible. Heavens, here was the crux !

Just towards the daylight, when the Holmer cocks began to crow, and the Hatchways swallows to twitter,—when M. du Frettay, outwearied with earnest philosophical researching, for hours, was dropping asleep,—abandoning the fray, alas, or postponing it,—in a half-sleeping, half-waking flash, his definition came to him. He had it. Had he it ? No,—yes. He was in love with not being in love with her. That is to say, with loving her merely. Which was where he started. . . . Excellent,—charming ! More, it was the case !

Done it, as the boys said : the nice boys, sleeping out there at Holmer. Done it, thank Heaven ! M. du Frettay turned his dark head on his white pillows, content, and slept.

‘ Good-bye,’ said Ernestine under the larch-trees.
‘ Come again.’

‘ Come again soon,’ said pretty Bess, with the Pickle on her arm. ‘ Don’t forget us.’

Forget them!—arm-in-arm as they stood, in the soft swaying shadows of feathery larch.

‘Come on, man,’ said Rick. ‘You’ll be late.’

He kissed their hands in turn, hands very like in their strength and shapeliness. He did not thank, for how on earth could he begin to thank her? She had taught him,—only taught him,—what England could be. Bess, with her sweet oddities and whims among animals had helped,—she was very English: but Ernestine held the secret: held it and would hold, for Gabriel’s spirit for ever. Fresh earth, soft shadows, and grey skies. Rare sunshine, the more loved when coming. Much rain, wisely tolerated. Tranquil lives of give-and-take with the simpler creatures. Heroes and hero-worship. Fixed hearts, clear eyes, and open arms. That was Hatchways, and England—probably!

‘They are a well-intentioned people,’ said a person behind du Frettay, on the Dover boat, as a group of his countrymen stood to watch the retreating cliffs. ‘If not effective always—however, I salute their good intentions.’

‘I salute Ernestine,’ said du Frettay in spirit: and he left these shores.

As it happened, he left something behind him,—besides his heart, which goes without saying. He was thinking about the monoplane and other matters while he packed: and besides, he made the mistake of refusing assistance. Miss Ryeborn, as her aunt was engaged, offered her help upon the staircase: but M. du Frettay, whose thoughts were already in France, since he was packing to return there, refused gravely. He thought it indecorous to have a young and pretty girl packing with him in his room. He was thinking

so Frenchly, that it even seemed to him Bess should not have proposed it. . . . Later, he regretted it, of course. He had accumulated stacks of things at Hatchways, things for himself, and things for his friends, and for his mother, and for the young lady he might marry sometime, who all gave him commissions. It was really quite a distracting business, getting them together, and reckoning them up.

Consequently, M. du Frettay left an intensely precious 'carnet,' and commissioned Iveagh by letter and several telegrams to look for it, somewhere towards the end of May. Again, he would have done far better to commission the Hatchways ladies, but he was too polite. Besides, the carnet being pocket-size, might be anywhere,—hence the telegrams. He kept on thinking of new places where it might be.

The Wickford family was by then in town, for Gabriel did not get to work immediately on reaching home. He had to look up various friends in Paris: including the people who had really (unknown to everybody except Iveagh) sent him to England. He had to give these latter a free translation, couched in terrible slang, of what the 'types' at the English Admiralty said. All this took time. Further, Iveagh, though interested by the telegrams, postponed for a time the friendly duty they suggested. He intended to look for Gabriel's thing, down at Holmer, long before he did. Iveagh had a habit, contracted early in life, when habits are firmest, of believing things never really get lost, merely lie about visibly appertaining to their owners until somebody puts a hand upon them. He had once left a saddle in the main street of Castle Wickford for three days including market-day, nobody thinking of touching it, since it was known to

belong to a certain horse. 'That'll be Rory's saddle,' said the passers, at intervals. 'They'll be fetching it from the Castle soon.' Thus Irishly may he have thought of Gabriel's carnet. However it may be, it was not till the Duchess came down for a late Whitsun week-end that Iveagh, graciously attaching himself to his mother's house-party for the purpose, really got to work.

Even then, Saturday he was still busy in the stables and about the place; but Sunday morning church-time really suited him. It seemed appropriate. He routed about with Michael's assistance in Wick's room and elsewhere on Holmer premises; and then—having acquired all sorts of things, but not the carnet—strolled down the Avenue and lane to Hatchways: where he was received, after an interval, in a painting pinafore, by Bess.

'How's yourself?' asked Iveagh, not at all surprised to see her, though she was no more a matter of course than he was. She was merely down at her aunt's for a Whitsun week-end too. Bess having been early to church like a good girl, was now having a quite working-morning without anybody, while the household sat at the Vicar's sermon. Iveagh entered into her feelings at being disturbed, and offered to go away again 'till she felt like it,'—they were such nice sympathetic boys. However, Bess took a time off, and soon extracted his business.

'It isn't here,' said Bess, of the carnet, 'or Ernestine would have sent it long ago.'

This was new light to Iveagh, that anyone could say for certain whether a thing was in a house or no.

'He might have mislaid it,' he murmured vaguely.

Thereupon, Bess let him look, just to show him what

order, in a house like theirs, amounted to. She took him to her uncle's study, and the library, and Gabriel's room upstairs, and opened drawers for him, and threw cupboard-doors wide, in silent demonstration. Iveagh was soon discouraged visibly, as to the chances of 'mislaying' anything, for good, at Hatchways. He became cast-down, as he should be, and stood in perplexity.

'He has it in his pocket, the man,' he murmured. 'One of his coats.' All Iveagh's immediate acquaintance had tried to make him pronounce Gabriel's first name, which they were certain he used, fruitlessly. 'He' or 'the man' sufficed him.

'I don't think M. du Frettay is at all like that,' objected Bess. 'And if he had found it himself,' she added, 'he would have telegraphed.'

'Why?' said Iveagh.

'Is it dreadfully important?' said Bess presently. They had now got down to Hatchways door.

'Well—he wired three times in two weeks he wanted it.'

'Oh, Iveagh!'—dimpling in despair of him. 'And you only tell us now.' Pause, Bess hanging on the door. 'He carried his notebooks about with him everywhere,' she ventured. 'Always taking things down.'

Iveagh agreed. 'He set me right from one of them once about my mother's own relations. Even the Elphinstones,' said Iveagh, chucking a stone at a bird, 'he had straight in his mind before he left. You would have said it concerned him. . . . But this was not that sort,' he added. 'It's figures, he says.'

'Oh. Perhaps,' said Bess demurely, 'it's in one of your pockets. You did figures for him, didn't you?'

'I did,' said Iveagh. They had now got away from Hatchways, on towards the larch-trees, Bess having left her pinafore, *par prudence*, behind her in the hall. 'You might bring me,' he hinted, 'a bit along the road.'

'I'm not really dressed, you know,' said Bess, coming. 'We might meet some Church people.'

Iveagh admitted they might. They went along the road. It was a nice day, uncertain, with bits of sun. There was a little breeze about, occasionally, making the leaves twinkle, and turning the dust. The lane smelt of what lanes do smell of, in May that is nearly June. The principal scent (excluding dust) was that little herb-plant called ground-ivy, and of course omnipresent grass. Grass makes a good half of the scents of England, at least until the hay: and none of the Holmer fields were cut as yet.

'Are you off soon?' said Bess shyly: he was so silent.

'When I've picked up a few diseases.'

'Diseases? Oh, must you be inoculated? Doesn't it hurt?'

'I'll tell you in a week's time,' said Iveagh, holding the Holmer gate open. 'Come a little along the Avenue,' he mentioned. 'Mother's at church.'

'I shall be in London in a week,' said Bess, coming doubtfully.

'So will I be. *Why*,' challenged Iveagh, as the gate fell behind him, 'do we never see you in London, Bess?'

Well, how should they? Wickford would not have asked such a question. One would not 'drop in' on the Wickfords in London as in the country,—not that she did here. Besides, Iveagh's mother did

not like her,—she thought he might have realised that.

‘I don’t do much calling,’ she said gently. ‘I’ve really hardly got the clothes.’

Clothes? Iveagh glanced at her sidelong. Her little blue cotton gown and fluttering white collar made him think of a certain butterfly of the uplands,—he knew the name. It was cleft at the throat according to the fashion of that year, which was a good fashion. Altogether, Iveagh could not conceive his Aunt Isabel, on a Sunday, looking half so nice.

Bess blushed when his eyes turned in her direction.

‘I’m poor,’ she said,—perhaps a little fiercely.

‘There’s a pair of us then,’ Iveagh consoled her. ‘Do you like these trees?’

‘No, I can’t abide them,’ said Bess, still fierce. ‘Of course,’ she added, ‘they belong to your brother. Never mind what I say.’

‘I’ll tell him you can’t abide them,’ said Iveagh, propitiating. ‘He’s with you too, and so was she, but there’ll never be anything done with them while mother’s alive. . . . Bess.’

‘Well?’ said Bess.

‘You’ve the clothes to ride in, anyhow. Suppose we fetched you one mornin’ for ridin’,—any you like.’ He was clearly pleased by this solution, the common one in a Suir world,—horses.

‘Thank you.’ She laughed sweetly, having recovered. ‘There’s only one objection, Iveagh,—rather serious, though. I don’t ride.’

He swung on his heel and transfixed her fully, really looked her in the face. Not *ride*? Equally amazing he had never dreamt of it, owing to the excuse of that

eternal easel when their parties formed. Iveagh seemed really put out for the moment. Next he grew grave to sourness, walking at her side. All along the Avenue he had nothing to say, looking in front of him : but within he was thinking urgently, modelling all things with rapid fingers to a new need. Not *ride*, the girl ? Impossible ! Not to be borne for a minute,—for more than three minutes. . . .

As they came out upon the drive, behold, a glistening horse. A chestnut, well-kept and nicely saddled for a lady, held by Tim. Tim was in the act of turning its head towards the stable.

‘ There’s Ebony, that’ll do us,’ remarked Iveagh : he being acquainted with every horse in the district, and having bought most of them.

‘ Oh, but it’s Adelaide’s,’ said Bess. Nowadays she hardly knew Adelaide. She continued her protests, growing alarmed : but Iveagh was calm,—cloudless. What could it matter whose the horse was, since he needed him ? Up she went !

‘ We’ll come round the long way to the stable,’ said Iveagh, casually dismissing Tim. Tim, abandoning the bridle to him, looked on cannily, but quite without surprise. One had, being Tim, only to change countries to follow Lord Iveagh’s proceedings perfectly. Over there, the mere adopting of another lady’s horse for twenty minutes or so, was as natural as rain out of a blue sky, which happens there constantly. It was true, Tim’s respected master was dealing, at this minute, with an English young lady : still, he trusted him by old experience, having picked her out of the mass, to work her in.

Bess, palpitating with mingled pride, panic, and shyness, was worked in rapidly. She set her little

slipper in his hand, as directed, and was lightly lifted upon Ebony, Adelaide's horse. (Why Ebony, for a chestnut, everyone had forgotten,—it was a joke.) Panic was not the smallest part of her sensations. Horses were quite without the range of her studies hitherto: and—‘Oh, will it move?’—was in consequence her first remark.

‘He will not, at present,’ said Iveagh, exquisitely amused. Of all things in heaven or earth—this, of all girls! He could hardly believe it. However, he was serious, or nearly so; and since it was evident Bess did not know by the light of nature where knee, elbow, and ankle ought to be, he put them right with gentle touches, and, gathering up the reins, slipped them through her hand. Then he removed her other hand from Ebony's mane, absently. Then he took a general view of her with one eyebrow lifted,—not bad. It seemed, he did not despair of her figure on horseback eventually,—sometime hence.

‘Now then,’ he encouraged, a hand to the horse's head,—and at once Bess clutched him. Clutched his shoulder,—this was cowardly!

‘You must not,’ said Iveagh, as, apologising with a look to Ebony, he stopped him again.

‘I'm sorry,’ said Bess, drooping. ‘I was afraid you were going——’

‘I'll not leave you,’ said Iveagh quietly. ‘This horse is eleven years and three months,—not a frolic in him.’

Bess drooped more, her blue eyes lowered humbly. Such knowledge of a horse's birthday reduced her quite. That he should have to say it, too,—to Ebony's face——

‘Don't make it go fast,’ she murmured.

‘Him,’ said Iveagh. ‘And leave that looser, I’ll see to it.’ His hand came back to hers, for the moment, then slipped behind her. ‘If you fall, you’ll fall on to me,’ he said, encouraging. ‘But you cannot, if you sit easy. Walkin’, it’s not possible. *Now* then——’

Well, it was nicer than Bess had thought. Ebony was real, came to life beneath her, a big breathing animal. He had a personality, a presence majestic, if saturnine. He had manners too. He must, of necessity, have been scoffing in spirit, exchanging bright glances with the Suir beside him, and used to adequate Amazons, like Adelaide. Still he contained his equine mirth, phlegmatically,—better than Iveagh did. Ebony was an Oxborough, possibly.

They went the long way to the stable by the Shrubberies, under shadow, then sun, then shadow again. Bess rode in dreamland, in a legend somewhere,—a very ancient legend,—wondering if it were real. So far from home,—how she even came there——

‘Is that right?’ said Iveagh presently, slipping back a look.

‘It’s lovely,’ murmured Bess. ‘He’s a darling. I never knew——’

‘Of course ye did not,’ said Iveagh, consoling. ‘You’ll come on to it.’ He considered whether to tell her that she sat quite well, and decided against. Next time, if her present progress continued. . . . ‘Will you go on to the yard, or dismount here?’

‘Oh, here, please,’ said Bess, with a thought of eyes, professional though polite, about the stables. She was not even attired correctly,—far from it. Her cotton skirt was a trifle short. . . . And Sunday. . . . No, better dismount where she was, in the discreet depths of the shrubbery. It was quiet. . . . Quiet!

Little did she know his tricks ! No quieter corner on the estate than the Holmer Shrubberies of old cropped hawthorns, which surging over them made dimness, the scent of the leaves hanging round. Hawthorn leaves, sweeter to breathe than its cruel flowers, ever crueller as the season ages. . . . But now the flowers were done, and the apple-scent of the leaves hung only, mellower, more lasting, fresh as a final truth. . . . Besides, how should Bess, unused to horse-company, realise what 'dismounting' meant ? Mounting, though breathless a little, had been swift, soon over. Now she came right into his arms and——

'Iveagh !' she said, with a little sob.

'Quiet,' he said softly to the horse, which being loosened, snatched at the leaves. 'Are you frightened, darlin' ?'

Frightened ?—with him ? The day changed colour. The leaf-scent swept over her like immortal incense. Every lazy little piping bird of Holmer shrubberies broke into song. It was so, this was himself, his arms about her, the hand she had always loved and trusted gathering her face with delicate strength to his.

'Not here,' she gasped, the Puritan of the north striving in her. 'Not now——'

'Don't you believe I may ?' His strange melancholy pierced her, at very close quarters. 'It was not for want of wishing—but she never let me,' came the confession, true into her spirit, from his eyes. 'Do you believe that ?' he asked, in his own person.

'I'm afraid,' she confided, shuddering at herself, 'I shouldn't care.'

He laughed, breathing easily now. Utterly his, he had known it. No hint of smallness, jealousy, carping,—she could not.

‘ You’re the girl of all girls,’ he swore. ‘ There was never much doubt of it.’

‘ But you’re very insulting, Iveagh,—never much doubt !’

‘ Well, I’m goin’ to insult you further. Come on,—coquettin’.’

Coquetting !—when she was trying to behave !
‘ Say something nicer first,’ she pleaded.

‘ I’ll show you nicer.’

‘ But it’s Sunday.’

‘ Well, there are six worse days.’

‘ Oh,’ she gasped, hiding her head. ‘ I don’t know why I like you.’

‘ You don’t like me,—you *do* not, Bess. Let’s see how little you do,’ said Iveagh.

‘ I don’t know,’—muffled,—‘ what you want me to——’

She never finished. The terror of love, and its truth, for they are one and simultaneous, met her and carried her away. Lost for ever, no doubt of it : and found, in the same breath. And Iveagh found himself too, quite easily : took the last step to safety : touched the other end of his youth’s troubled tangle without fumbling, in the lips of an honest girl.

XXIII

CURTAIN DOWN

BESS hoped Tim did not notice the difference when she reached the stable, though how anyone in the world should not——! Tim, oddly enough, looked much the same. He seemed chiefly concerned about Ebony. Obviously, he did not dare to question Iveagh's doings in delaying the Duchess's visitor's horse from proper care for so long a period,—for several centuries. Anyhow, Tim gave no sign. Nor did he seem aged, he was young and cheery. . . . But there was worse to come.

Hardly were she and Iveagh out of the stable-yard, through the gate into the garden, making, of course, for Hatchways by a roundabout route, when—what do you think? The Honourable Mrs. Courtier in a habit (horror!) and Lady Oxborough, and the Duchess of Wickford in person,—without exception the three most overpowering feminine presences in that countryside,—were seen issuing from the Duchess's new glass house. Two of them back from church in a loftily-superior after-sermon mood: one of them calling with a piece of confidential information. Bess stopped, horror-struck. If they went on, by the path they were following, they must meet them, all in a row!

‘What’s the matter?’ said Iveagh idly. ‘That’s only my mother and my aunt and another woman.’ Another woman!—when they had been stealing her horse!

‘Can’t we go back?’ she murmured.

‘Why?’

So like him,—wonderful gallantry, pride, and firmness! Only—well—Bess would have to share his assumptions now. She bit her lip.

‘Let me tell her,’ she murmured.

‘Why?’ said Iveagh again: smiling, bold and bad,—heavens, what a handful of a husband! No doing anything with him, either: he was bound to get his way.

‘Very well,’ said Bess, gently resigning.

‘Let you if you want to, darlin’,’ said Iveagh, passionately. ‘You’d do it best.’

Dear me!—however, he was too close to her. Bess put a hand on his arm to hold him off. As they approached the other party, the Duchess looked more overpowering, Sunday-like, and serious. Lady Oxborough was petrifying, so pink and placid. Mrs. Courtier in a habit was Hyde Park Corner convention personified. . . . No, she could not!

‘Be good,’ she whispered. ‘You shall do it. Only remember——’

‘I’m rememberin’.’ The parties met.

‘Iveagh, you’ll do,—what’s the silly name of that thing your mother has on the——’ etc., from the aunt.

‘Iveagh, go and tell them in the stable Mrs. Courtier is ready for her——’ etc., from the mother.

‘Iveagh, I hear you’re off,’ drawled Mrs. Courtier: but civilly, in something the right tone.

None of them noticed Bess, not one of them. She might have been one of the housemaids, walking along in her little cotton gown at his side. It was true, the Duchess's eyes, at the encounter, had swept from face to face: a sharp look, dubious,—she was a mother. But she was greatly occupied by this news of Adelaide's engagement her friend had brought. It had been hard to keep her lofty level of serenity on the occasion, and console Mrs. Courtier as was fitting,—it was distinctly hard. She feared a new strain with Wickford,—which she really could not stand,—would certainly result. Especially as it would be her melancholy duty, as his mother, to point the moral of his slackness,—amusing himself too long with another girl. The sight of Bess, of course, revived her slumbering hostility. Still hanging about Hatchways, was she?—showing herself here,—not even decently dressed!

'We're off in six weeks or so,' said Iveagh, confining his reply to the visitor, not to either of his relations. 'That's time enough to see to things, and pull through our diseases. *She's* comin' along.'

Bess blushed pink, as his hand found her again,—it had left her for five minutes. Such a way of doing it, and when she had entreated him to remember,—to be considerate! Iveagh, in so replying, was remembering possibly.

Mrs. Courtier, a woman of fashion and fundamental breeding, recovered her balance first. Neither of the Oxboroughs made the least attempt to adapt themselves,—not the slightest. But Mrs. Courtier did. She addressed, and congratulated, Miss Ryeborn. Why? Because she had to. She placed Bess on the instant in her social hand of cards, high up, and so recovered her tone for the occasion. She recognised, admirably com-

petent as she was, this news knocked hers out completely, by her own rules. This little cotton-robed painting-girl would take precedence, not only of Addy, but of herself. A duke's daughter-in-law (we can only suppose) overtrumps a baron's daughter, in Mrs. Courtier's favourite game.

For, note well, as M. du Fretay said, there was no question whatever that this dreadful boy, who had worried poor Gertrude's life out, would do what he said. He might be doing it out of spite, either to his mother, his brother, or the Fitzmaurice girl,—but do it he would, and stylishly. Iveagh's style, though admittedly singular, had often struck Mrs. Courtier. It was better than his brother's, really,—more savage, as it were,—more *chic*. She was certain, if he chose to drag the girl out of obscurity, tour the world with her, and bring her back to London, money or no, he would get her through. For, as to giving yourself tropical diseases, and travelling, even into the most ghastly places, that is quite all right. Heaps of people one knows do it. The reception given, by quite inexpressible persons, to Sir George Trenchard, during the season under Mrs. Courtier's view, proved that.

'I'm afraid,' said Bess, trembling, 'he put me on your horse. It was rather naughty—but we saw it—Ebony——'

'Ah yes, what do you think of him?' drawled Mrs. Courtier, in a really paralysing manner; as though Bess had done her a favour, and was to be presumed a judge.

'He's a darling,' said Bess: which was, as it happened, the perfect answer. 'But I don't know how to ride,' she added, with native sincerity.

'Ah well, he's a safe old beast,' said Ebony's

mistress, and looked at her watch. 'Gertrude, I must be off. Congrats. all round. Don't put yourselves out'—to the young couple, with great civility.

'Iveagh——' said the Duchess, awfully.

'Iveagh——' breathed Bess: *such* a different tone! '*Please* do your duty and leave me,' it said.

'You go along to the glass house, darlin',' said Iveagh. 'Look at all the little things on the right side till I tell you their names. Don't believe the names that are stuck on them. I'll not be five minutes. Mother——'

It was the crux. Had the Duchess struck at that point—but she did not. She could not, somehow. Isabel waited for her,—she strove visibly, valiantly,—and then went under to her handful of a son, like the rest.

'You'll lunch with us, Elizabeth——' Victory! Mrs. Courtier knew it. He had carried Bess with him already, through the first and stiffest line.

There is little more, but notes, to add to this history.

'Dear Iveagh,—dear boy,' said Ernestine. 'I don't know why I am so glad about it.'

Her face was pressed in her hands as she sat, late that night, on a cushion at her husband's feet. It was her way to sit on the floor at times, when none of the young fry were about. A long time ago, when she was engaged herself, she had done it, Rick remembered, still more frequently.

'I'm sure you deserve it,' said Rick, a broad hand on her hair. 'You've worked enough. Now you'll

have to start again on somebody else, won't you? What about t'other one,—he'll be stiffer work, I fancy.'

'I leave Wick to Gertrude,' said Ernestine, smiling faintly; but he saw her wet eyes. To see that boy, of all boys, happy,—it was enough for her. Enough for a lifetime really. But then nobody else, unless Wick, had ever seen Iveagh at the worst. Three Whit-Sundays since, she had been remembering that morning, she had prayed for his life, no less, before her little country altar, while his mother sat with absent eyes and darkened brow, and his brother's head was buried in his arms,—like hers. And Lise, sweet little Lise, cut church and walked with Mark, as her Bess had done with Iveagh that morning. . . . Wonderful, evidently,—nature's change, nature's grouping, no work of hers.

It never is the work of people like Ernestine, you may have noticed: no doubt because they work with nature.

'Ripping, Bess, I'm so glad,' said Wickford, on the terrace of the House of Commons, where they caught his Grace at teatime,—most correct.

'No, ye don't,' said Iveagh, cutting in between them, just in time. 'You've flirted about long enough, as it is, for me.'

'Later,' telegraphed the Duke, across him, with a clear wink,—not quite adapted to his present position. However, there was no one else very near, except a fair girl, sandy rather—whom he and Iveagh called Janet familiarly, though Bess suspected her of being something rather grand.

Wick had to make the party up, of course, when

he asked the other girl to tea. The Suirs did things nicely.

'Can you put up Bess as well?' telegraphed Iveagh to M. du Frettay, he being under the obligation of finishing his diseases, and finding fire-arms, in Paris.

'Enchanted—felicitations—mention whether married or no, for Mamma,' telegraphed back M. du Frettay, causing shocks to all the nice girls in the telegraph offices, as the message made its way across. But Parisian people, friends especially, are never to be trusted, as any of the Oxboroughs would have told you. Wickford and Iveagh, equally amused, set that telegram up on the chimneypiece in the hall at Holmer, till their aunt tore it down and burnt it.

Madame du Frettay, who was about ten times as particular about things in general as the Duchess, and lived on terms with the raw materials of her hospitality which would have shocked the Duchess's maid, mentioned in a letter to her married daughter that the young 'Lord Suir,' Gabriel's friend, was by several degrees the least conceited Englishman she had ever come across, and his wife an able designer, and a teachable girl. The rest of the letter was about Gabriel, whose disgusting application to those machines was making it more and more difficult for her to get him safely married to the girl she meant. Whether she did or not, we leave to those who know French mothers, and their various divergences from English, to determine. A few years after, Gabriel's machines became the mode, and himself as well: but that is in everybody's memory.

Gabriel worked with nature too, like Ernestine, but subtly, to defeat nature,—such is the mocking Gallic spirit. And he succeeded, he and his friends, in the course of quite a few majestic and memorable years. Nor will he and his kind ever cease to lend humanity wings, however humanity, blind and thankless, disregard and desecrate their inventions. Looking at the sky as they do constantly, well above men's heads, they are not easily depressed !

Conor Arthur William Suir, Viscount Kells in the English, and Duke of Wickford (with earships more ancient) in the Irish peerage, brought home in his own good time an absolutely irreproachable girl to his mother, whom the Duchess had never happened to meet, though both the boys seemed to know her familiarly. 'Janet,' as they called her, owned coal-mines as well as an unblemished Gaelic escutcheon. She was pretty (trust Wick !) albeit sandy a trifle, and perfectly conversant, what was oddest of all, with his affairs. Wickford, it seemed, had laid these before her, in great detail, the day he proposed, since he and Janet had been friends for long, and he was far too honest to deceive her. The fact that he offered her a coronet (between friends) was overlooked. That is to say, Wickford overlooked it. Whether or no Lady Janet did, we simply cannot say. She was of unblemished Highland origin.

Lise, losing her first delicate baby, had no second child,—a tragedy. She suffered bitterly as such natures do : but she rose to tragedy as she rose to comedy, fully and easily, facing it straight. Mark loved her with a tenderness he was quite unable to express,

more passionately and inconspicuously, of course, when tragedy made its quiet appearance between them. Wickford, we are sorry to say, simply hated him at their last encounter: it was all anybody could do to keep the peace. Iveagh was far more tolerant. But then, he always had been,—because he loved Lise.

That the man who loved an Elizabeth Fitzmaurice, faithfully as Iveagh did, may love an Elizabeth Rye-born just as well, should need, and shall have, no explanation. Did not Shakespeare give a Rosaline to his Romeo, before ever Juliet came to make his love immortal? Could his author not have suppressed Rosaline, and soothed sentimentality, had he chosen? And need a man know better than Shakespeare, or than Romeo, in this life?

Iveagh did not. His was the same courtly ideal,—the service of a boy's dreamland to Lise, for ever,—and a man's love to Bess. He and Bess were delightfully happy, delightfully fond of one another, and he carried her about with him all over the world. They shot back to London occasionally, Iveagh to see his brother, and Lady Iveagh her aunt. It would have been far nicer, of course, if they had come, respectively, to see their parents: but the nice thing, on this earth, is so seldom done. The Duchess remained to the end impatient with Iveagh. She never quite forgave him for marrying that girl; nor for making himself, in the end, a bigger newspaper name than Wickford's. But that was George's fault, entirely. George, persistently curious about uncharted and unhealthy districts always, dragged everybody attached to him, Iveagh included, in his triumphant train.

There is also, we believe, a small tropical water-plant,

to be seen at Kew, named Suirii. And as this gives a good idea of the impossibilities attempted by Science, and the absurdities reached by it, with a glance of sympathy towards Lady Oxborough, we close this tale.

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